

EDWARD DALTON,

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CLARENDON.

CHAPTER I.

ELEANOR had, in truth, been found: she was not dead, although at first, when, pale as death, with her beautiful black hair falling in a dishevelled mass over a bosom as white as alabaster, Norman Macdonald consigned her to the arms of Eric Dennison, who had remained in the attitude of prayer, with his hands clasped before him, and the big tears coursing rapidly down his venerable features, on the edge of the lake, during the whole of the short and painful interval that had elapsed, until they brought him the joyful news that his daughter, at any rate, was safe, they thought she was really so,—Eleanor was not dead, although the death-swoon into which she

had fallen so nearly resembled the victory of the king of terrors, that even Eric's tears flowed faster than ever, as he carried her towards the house, pushing away the officious footmen, and even the portly Mr. Mac Graw himself, who volunteered his services; no, Eric would not trust one so precious, even to their hireling arms. Norman had consigned her to his care, after snatching one passionate kiss from those cold, cold lips; and Eric bore his precious load with all the strength of his own vigorous manhood, only begging those who flocked around him to run forward, and cause the proper restoratives to be in readiness: but Norman's ready foresight had already prepared this.

And at the door, so ghastly pale and terrible looking, that even Eric Dennison shuddered as he gazed upon her, stood the aged mistress of Leven; her withered, fleshless, sharp, haggard visage, starting eye-balls, and quivering lips, forming a hideous contrast to the brilliant dress she wore; her tall, gaunt figure standing out in bold relief against the glare of the light streaming out into the night without.

“Oh, Eric! Eric! Is my child, my Eleanor, alive? Eric Dennison, you that I have known from childhood,—you that I have revered and looked up to,—Oh, speak, for mercy’s sake!”

“Hush, Lady Susan,” said Eric, calmly; “Miss Clarendon, I trust, may yet be recovered.”

“But I must see her,” cried Lady Susan, trembling from head to foot; “I will not believe even you, Eric. I must know for myself that she is not dead.”

“Your ladyship must be patient, or your very anxiety will frustrate all our hopes,” interposed Eric, waving her aside; “have I not left my own sweet Lucy to the care of heaven, from the first moment that I learned she was saved? and can you not trust in the same Providence who has consigned this dear girl, for the present, to my care? Lady Susan, make way, and let me pass.”

And Eric Dennison motioned to the old house-keeper who, at that moment appeared in the hall, to lead the way to Miss Clarendon’s room, and casting a look of pity on Lady Susan as he passed, ascended the stairs with his insensible

burden. Lady Susan followed, quite subdued, to all appearance scarcely more alive than Eleanor herself; and when they gained the elegant room hallowed by the young girl's hourly presence, the proud, passionate, eccentric, Lady Susan flung herself on her knees at the foot of the bed, and, with her head buried in the bed clothes, gave token only of her presence by a passionate sob at intervals, until the breathless and alarming crisis was passed, and life hung once more between heaven and earth, with Eleanor Clarendon.

"May I stay, Eric?" said Norman, who, notwithstanding the uncomfortable state he was in, still lingered in the room; "I should wish to be the first Miss Clarendon saw on recovering, if you don't think I should be in the way."

"No! no! go, my dear lad;" cried Eric, impatiently, as he directed Mrs. Morris and her two assistants to apply warm flannels to Eleanor's feet and bosom. "You can do no good here," and he held a small mirror to Eleanor's lips.

Norman's quick eyes detected the mist rising

on its unsullied surface, long before the old man's duller vision had discerned it; and for this he was permitted to stay, much to the good Mrs. Morris's indignation, who could not refrain, even amidst all her anxiety and sorrow (for even the very cinder-sifter at Leven had come to love Eleanor Clarendon) for our heroine: but Norman never cared for her inuendos, and was at length driven fairly from the room by the indignant old domestic, who told him he ought to take shame to himself, and never show his face at Leven again. Norman, however, knew that Eleanor would recover, and that was bliss unspeakable for him in his present mood, and he could communicate his joy to others as well.

Eleanor's head was lying on the old house-keeper's breast, her black tresses, still damp, and thickly clotted together, hanging in a dishevelled mass over one arm. There was a faint flutter at the heart, and a still fainter flush visible in the marble countenance, which told that life still hovered in its shrine. Eric was leaning over the pair, now speaking in a low, anxious voice,

scarcely louder than a whisper ; now feeling with one hand the pulse of the delicately veined wrist he held in the other, in the hope of detecting the slightest symptoms of returning animation. Eleanor's beautifully moulded limbs were lying rigidly gathered into a heap, in the blankets in which they had placed her. The blue veins on her forehead stood out plain and distinct on the painfully colourless skin ; the long black lashes seemed folded over the two dark, speaking eyes that the old man had marvelled at, at their first interview. The two other women, simple, honest, country girls, were standing with open mouths and streaming eyes, chafing the cold, cold limbs and feet by turns. Lady Susan was still on her knees, for she had never moved. A light footstep was heard in the gallery outside, pacing almost noiselessly yet impatiently to and fro. Eric saw and felt all this, as all men do at those fearful epochs that happen in the lifetime of all, when life and all that life is worth hangs on a thread : the very agony he felt within seemed only to make the

outward faculties the more vivid, and at that moment, the old housekeeper uttered a low "God be thanked," and Eleanor's head fell back upon Eric's arm, and her eyes opened and then closed again.

Lady Susan cast a wild, hurried, startled glance upon them, as she heard the exclamation, and then buried herself in the clothes; and then Eric, with a trembling hand and a still more trembling heart, poured a wonderful elixir, more precious than all the gold of Ophir to him at that moment, down his patient's throat, and Eleanor once more opened her eyes and smiled faintly.

"She lives! she lives! God of heaven, I thank thee!" cried Eric, in a loud voice, startled by deep joy out of his habitual cautiousness, and he motioned them to lay Eleanor down in the bed, whilst simple, good Mrs. Morris fairly gave in and wept outright, and was instantly aided and abetted by her two subordinates.

And then Lady Susan, much more lifeless, very much more lifeless than poor Eleanor, rose

to her feet, and slowly and silently joined Eric at the bed, casting one wild, startled look upon the deathly brow and pallid countenance, and then sank down, unheeded and unheeding, in a chair beside her.

Half an hour passed, and Eleanor Clarendon's voice, weak and trembling as that of a little child, was heard in that silent chamber.

"Why are there so many people about me," faltered she, after gazing with a look of vacancy, painful to witness, on Eric Dennison's venerable features; "I surely have not been ill?"

"My dear child," said the old man, quietly, "you have indeed been very ill; nay, you still are so, and I must request you will not exhaust your returning strength by talking just yet."

"Ill? ha! I really do feel weak—very, very. I—I ought to remember you, sir," said she, gazing wistfully into the old man's face, though without appearing to recognise him; "I must have dreamed it, but—but I fancied Cecil snatched me out of the water; but that, you

know, was quite a dream, for I've not been in the water—no, no.”

Eric heard Lady Susan's stifled sobs; his own calm philosophy was almost overcome by the affecting manner in which poor Eleanor said the few words we have recorded. And all this while Eleanor's fancy was busy within her, wondering who all those people could be that were around her, and why they had darkened the chamber so, and how she had come to feel so weak. Her lips were hot and feverish; her eyes glittered like diamonds under their heavy lashes; a bright scarlet flush dyed her beautiful features—all betraying the presence of the fever that was gathering strength within.

“Is that Cecil?” cried she, suddenly, as another figure appeared amongst those who were gathered round the bed. “Ah, yes, I see it is; Cecil! oh, fie, Cecil, to stay away so long from poor Eleanor.”

“We must have a doctor, Norman,” whispered Eric, withdrawing the young man into the room; fever is evidently gaining ground, and must be checked without loss of time.”

“I will go; I can ride faster than any of Lady Susan’s grooms; I know every inch of the way,” said the young man, eagerly, in a subdued tone. “Eric! I as well as you, as all of us have, have a stake in Eleanor Clarendon’s safety, and as I have now changed my clothes, I can be on horseback in five minutes or less; I will go, Eric, for I know the country better than any one else by night.”

“Go, Norman, I can depend upon you,” said Eric, calmly; “in an hour, at furthest, I shall expect your return with Dr. Easton. All the less time you take, Eleanor shall thank you for when she recovers.”

“God bless you, Eric; look well to Eleanor,” said the young man, in an earnest whisper, wringing the old man’s hand, as he stole out of the room on tiptoe, and in less than five minutes he was in the saddle.

As Norman, on his own favourite hunter, rode hurriedly out of the court-yard, a chaise and pair, all splashed and spattered up to the very roof, driven by an old, withered, battered, misanthro-

pical, one-eyed post-boy, and dragged by a couple of lean, miserable, broken-winded hacks, drove slowly round to the front entrance, from the interior of which there duly emerged a tall, cadaverous, lantern-jawed personage, with a very sinister cast of countenance, the ill-effect of which was further heightened by a sanctified attempt at a smile got up by the projecting lips and the slinking way of walking, the possessor of all these gifts exhibited. The new comer stooped rather, too, owing, perhaps, to his gaunt, square ill-looking shoulders being unable to support their own weight, and with all his studied endeavours to appear happy and at ease, his quick, restless, wandering gaze, and ghastly visage, betrayed an uneasiness and impatience, that had stamped their own haggard lineaments on his sodden and repulsive countenance.

“Is Lady Susan Clarendon to be seen?” inquired he, in a harsh, dissonant voice, of the groom who had just been seeing Norman off. “It is one o’clock, I perceive,” referring to his

watch ; “ but as I learned at Kelso, that her ladyship gives a fête to-night, I suppose she is still up.”

“ Yes sir, Lady Susan is up yet.—but you’d better inquire of t’ footmen,” quoth the man, turning on his heel.

“ I’ll mark you, my fine fellow,” muttered the stranger, darting a vindictive glance from under his dark brows, at the groom, as he went whistling away to the stables ; and desiring the post-boy to wait, he ran up the steps and entered the entrance hall, where he found a footman, of whom he inquired whether his mistress could be seen.

“ I’m afraid not, sir,” said the latter, respectfully, for at one glance he perceived that his interrogator held the rank, if he did not fully sustain the appearance, of a gentleman ; “ but if you will step into the library, I will endeavour to acquaint her ladyship ; what name shall I say, sir ? ”

“ None at all ; merely say that a gentleman

from the south wishes to have a short interview with her; you seem rather in confusion here, to-night, my man?"

"Yes, sir, we've just had rather a bad accident happen," said the lackey, holding the door in his hand.

"An accident, eh?"

"Yes, sir, a boat upset on the lake; you see Lady Susan had fireworks and such like, on the lake, it being a gala like, and the company sailed about in boats to enjoy it properly, and one in which Mr. Macdonald was, unfort'nitly upset."

"Bless me!" ejaculated his auditor, nervously; "and,—go on."

"And our young lady was nearly drowned; Mr. Norman's just gone off for the doctor, I believe," added the man.

"Hum! how very shocking!" ejaculated the stranger, apparently very much moved by this explanation; "in this world death follows life, hum! yes, death does indeed follow life, on the very heels," moralised he, stroking his ugly, uncouth

chin, solemnly ; “ there now, my man, you can go and fetch her ladyship to me,” and he waved the attendant from the room.

When left to himself, this pedantic personage, who could even find time to moralise when death brooded over the very house in which he found himself, amused himself by examining with a great deal of care, the costly and valuable pictures with which the room was hung ; these were heir-looms in the Clarendon family, being principally historical pictures in which that gallant and chivalrous race had figured in their country’s battles ; and he was standing on a chair with a silver candlestick in his hand, eagerly scanning one that had attracted his attention, when the door was hurriedly opened, and Mr. Mac Graw appeared.

Alick Mac Graw was a very great man, and his first impulse on seeing the use Lady Susan Clarendon’s velvet-seated chairs were put to, was to break out into a good, round oath, at the intruder’s impudence ; the stern and self-possessed air with which the latter, how-

ever, turned round and descended from his pedestal, subdued any such inclination. Nay, Mr. Mac Graw even felt weak enough to stammer and feel confused beneath the steady, icy gaze of those dark eyes, and he was really quite uncomfortable, and scarcely could find words to deliver the message with which he was charged, and which was to the effect that his mistress extremely regretted that she could not possibly see any stranger at such a moment.

“Is her ladyship ill, too?” demanded the traveller, with a sneer.

“Not exactly ill, sir,—that is to say, if I may qualify my assertion, not exactly well, either; in fact, we’ve a terrible house just now, there’s the company all hurrying away helter skelter home, except one or two, who will wait, and there’s my lady and Mr. Dennison up with Miss Clarendon in her chamber, and ——”

“Miss Clarendon!” interposed his auditor, starting, and changing colour, if his cadaverous complexion would admit of such a calumny,

“and is Miss Clarendon the unfortunate sufferer by the accident on the lake?”

“Yes, sir,” rejoined Mac Graw, whose pomposity began to rally, “our young lady, Miss Eleanor.”

“Hum! very sad! very sad, but it can’t be helped,” muttered the other, biting his lips and stroking his ugly chin, harder than ever, “even she must not stay the business. Hark ye, Mr. —, go up again to my Lady Susan Clarendon, and say that ‘the gentleman extremely regrets’ intruding upon her at such a season of affliction, but that the nature of his business is such, that it will not brook a moment’s delay;’ you can also add that I’ve travelled post three hundred miles, without resting, for this interview.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” stammered Mac Graw, “but, Lady Susan said that she couldn’t possibly see any one to-night, and that any message you wished to send her, might be given to me, and I——”

“Bah! I won’t be fooled with such excuses;

tell her ladyship I must see her, and that immediately," said the other, impatiently; "d'ye think I'd travel this way if I hadn't a cause?"

"No offence, sir," pleaded Mr. Mac Graw, humbly, "but those were Lady Susan's very words,—she stamped with her foot as she said 'em, and that's allays a symbol, sir, that she's immovable as a statty,—never, in all my life, knew her budge one jot after that!"

"Then, for once, sirrah, you shall see a miracle performed," and the stranger drew his note book from his pocket, and tearing a leaf angrily out, wrote in pencil:—"Life and death hangs on the interview I seek; I have much that is strange to acquaint you with, and that cannot be delayed even until the morning. Everything depends upon your despatch. J. V."

The last few words were underlined.

"There, take that, my good sir, and see that Lady Susan gets it at once," said he, in an authoritative tone, "and give my respects to her ladyship as well, and say that the urgency of the

business excuses my ill-breeding in intruding upon her, just now."

Mac Graw slunk out of the room at once with the hurriedly written scrawl, and the traveller sate down on a couch, with his arms folded over his hollow chest, crouching like a beast of prey, lying in wait for its victim. The brilliantly lighted room, (for the chandeliers had not yet been extinguished,) the exquisite taste with which it was furnished, and to attain which, no expense had been spared, formed a strange contrast to the soiled, travel-stained, forbidding appearance of this man, who, since the moment when he had written the note which Mac Graw had carried to Lady Susan, had seemed to assume a new character, so different did he appear.

The lank, stiff, grizzled hair, the narrow brow lined and furrowed with deep wrinkles, as if guilt had ploughed its own indelible marks for all men to behold; his keen, restless eyes glittering with an unnatural brilliancy; the broad, heavy jaws, in such bad keeping with all the other contracted

features, all seemed to transform themselves into another aspect, as if the very will of their possessor had power to alter his outward appearance, and make him as double faced in person as he was in mind.

Presently a heavy step was heard in the hall, and Lady Susan Clarendon stood before him.

CHAPTER II.

To start back and hold up her hands, whilst her whole figure betrayed the horror with which the stranger's appearance evidently possessed her, was Lady Susan Clarendon's first impulse. The next moment she tottered to a chair, and assuming a stern, impenetrable air, demanded, in a hollow voice, "And for what, Vernon, am I indebted to this visit? Is it not enough that one affliction should come upon my house, but that another—for I know you too well to expect better tidings—and that, perhaps a worse, should follow so closely on its heels?"

Jasper Vernon coughed, and took a pinch of snuff, as he said, "So, and you have had a misfortune, Lady Susan?"

"A heavy one, indeed," cried Lady Susan,

fixing her great, cold, grey eyes keenly on him, “one that has made me feel how wicked, and sinful, and hardened I have become—one that has made me look more deeply into myself, to examine my own heart, and betray to my own horrified feelings the base cruelty to which I have bound myself. Jasper! within the last hour I have prayed, when kneeling by Eleanor Clarendon’s bed, that God would in his mercy take that girl from the world, rather than suffer her to become the victim of your hellish schemes. I looked at her as she lay with her head on the pillow, her face as white as alabaster, looking still more deathly standing out from the black, wet hair around it, and I felt that to one so pure and spotless, death would be a happy escape from the life of misery in store for her. Oh, Jasper Vernon!” and Lady Susan, who, excited by her own words, had started up from her seat, swayed her tall, gaunt form back and forward towards her auditor, during the greater part of this strange scene; and then as she uttered his name, she suddenly paused, as if the utterance of it had

recalled her to herself, and in an altered tone exclaimed: "but iron, itself, is not harder than your heart, so that I need not hope to turn a wretch like you from your purpose!"

Not one word of all this seemed to have moved Jasper Vernon, to judge by the imperturbable smile that occupied his saturnine countenance during the whole of its delivery. He seemed like a spectator at a play, beholding the harrowing reality of a Siddons or a Helen Faucit, in "Venice Preserved," who exclaims, "How admirable, how truthful; but it is only acting!" and Jasper Vernon, muttered to himself, "It is only acting," as he said,

"And so, Eleanor is very ill, is she?"

"As ill as any one can be whose soul hovers between heaven and earth," said his companion, bitterly, "Yes, Vernon, Eleanor Clarendon is ill!"

Was it the tones of her voice, so sad, so strange, that seemed to pierce him to the heart, as he sat gloating like some hideous reptile over the ruin he was committing? Could it be that a wretch so hard, so icy, so impenetrable, had a

heart, however hardened? or, was it the sight of Lady Susan's bitter and poignant remorse, so strange and unaccountable in her whom he knew so well, that seemed to startle him? Oh! grant that it might be so!

"Ah—and you have sent for a doctor, of course, Lady Susan," said he, after another pause.

"I have; to save the life of one who is foredoomed to misery," was the stern rejoinder, "but enough of Eleanor; what is your business with me?" and Lady Susan's masculine visage was turned upon his, once more, with more than its wonted frigidity.

"Ah, I am glad to hear you ask that," coughed Jasper Vernon, rubbing his lean hands with an appearance of satisfaction, "it shows, Lady Susan, that even Eleanor's misfortune has not entirely prostrated your energy of character."

"Does it—umph! I don't think, Vernon, you came here to pay an old fool, like me, compliments, so you'd better open your business at once," quoth the Lady of Leven, as sternly as ever, despite the covert sarcasm.

Jasper Vernon tapped his snuff-box lid carelessly with one hand as he said, "Very bad news, Lady Susan, very bad!"

"You always were a bird of evil omen," rejoined her ladyship, with sparkling eyes, "but out with it at once, for I'm in no humour to dally with imaginary misfortunes," and she arose and stood before his chair, as if in an hurry to go.

"Well then—but your ladyship must prepare yourself," stammered Jasper, who, seemed to cringe, and diminish, and creep into himself, as it were, with every breath; so small and insignificant did he look, coiled up in his chair; "you really must!"

"Pshaw! this is mere fooling," muttered her ladyship, indignantly, as a scornful smile swept across her wrinkled features, "you have not murdered little Herbert, I hope!"

"Not quite! oh no, not quite so bad as that," stammered Jasper, shrinking more into himself, though his bright eye glittered as he spoke, "oh no, not quite, but nearly as bad though, for he's run away from my house—actually and truly run

away from the delightful home I offered him," continued Jasper with a hypocritical whine.

"Ran away!" echoed her ladyship, mechanically, as if she did not understand the words.

"Yes, and what is far worse—no! no! oh dear, what am I saying?—that is to say, nearly as bad—who should turn up at the very nick of time, but that vagabond Cecil; really and truly as I sit here, on the very morning we discovered that Herbert had fled, Cecil Clarendon walked into my justice room, accompanied by——"

"Whom?"

"Dalton!"

"Dalton returned again? that Edward Dalton who exercised so fatal an influence over the Clarendons?" screamed Lady Susan, the bare mention of that man's name making her start and change colour, whilst her features were distorted as if some terrible pain had smote her, "who estranged the colonel from his brother, who would have separated my husband from me had he been able, and cast me out, branded with the world's scorn—Dalton returned, and in

England ! oh, I am raving, or this is some hideous delusion got up to torture my already excited feelings."

"As there is a God in heaven, it is true," said Jasper Vernon, solemnly.

"And when did all this happen?"

"This day week. As soon as I found that all search was hopeless, I ordered advertisements to be inserted in all the local and some of the London papers, offering a reward for his discovery, and then came down post here."

Lady Susan heard him out in silence; marble itself could not be more rigid than she was, during the whole of this somewhat incoherent explanation, and her very words seemed to turn adamant, as they fell from her lips, when she demanded:

"And what then do you propose to do?"

"What can I do?" retorted Jasper, nervously, "I have done all, already, that I can think of; I have hunted the country for the boy, I have advertised him in every direction, I have never rested day nor night to track him, since the

very moment he was first missed ; what more can I do ? ”

There was an air of injured innocence about the man at this moment, most ludicrously in contrast with his cringing attitude, that would not have failed to strike Lady Susan at a happier moment ; now, however, she merely stared at him with her great, icy eyes for several minutes without speaking, until at length she said :

“ I’d wager a thousand guineas, Vernon, that that villain Dalton has secreted the boy in some safe retreat ; the boy’s flight at the very moment of his strange arrival exactly tallies with such a supposition. Yes, yes, depend upon it, Dalton knows where Herbert at this present moment is, as well as I know that you are sitting there before me.”

A gleam of joy overspread for a moment Jasper Vernon’s saturnine features, as her ladyship made this declaration ; it had scarcely appeared, however, before it vanished again, and he settled himself in his chair again with a stern despair, as he rejoined,

"No! Dalton, I am convinced, is not aware of his retreat."

"I am certain he is!"

At that moment the door opened suddenly, and a young man with a flushed, yet extremely handsome countenance, entered the room. He started back on perceiving a stranger in conversation with Lady Susan, and then with wellbred possession recovered himself in a moment.

"Will your ladyship go up with Dr. Easton to Miss Clarendon's room?" said he, turning his back upon Jasper Vernon.

"Yes, I think I will, Norman," said Lady Susan, emphasizing the young man's name, that Jasper might notice it, "I have just this moment left our poor darling with Eric Dennison and Lucy; lend me your arm, my dear."

Norman assisted her to rise, which on this occasion seemed to be a work of greater difficulty than it usually was with her ladyship.

"I will see you in the morning, if all is well," said she, extending her hand to Vernon, "you

look so much fatigued that I will at once send Mac Graw to conduct you to your room. *Adieu.*"

"I will see your ladyship before I leave," was Jasper's response, as his keen glance met that of the young man, "pray do not detain either your young friend or yourself longer from the side of one who deserves all your love," and Jasper bowed gallantly as he seated himself again.

"Why didn't the old fool get a plainer and an older lover than that?" was his soliloquy, as Mac Graw appeared; "he is ~~too~~ young, and romantic, and weak for my plans, far too weak!"

"Who is that man, Lady Susan?" was Norman's blunt question, as they traversed the hall, "had I not seen him in your company, I should have taken him for a pickpocket, or something equally bad; upon my word, I should."

"Fie, Norman! I am quite ashamed of you: it is a gentleman who has in part the management of poor Colonel Clarendon's affairs;" and Lady Susan heaved a foreboding sigh.

"I pity the poor colonel, if he is aware of the

very suspicious custody he has entrusted his affairs to," rejoined Norman; "but, *nous verrons*, how is Eleanor?"

"Recovering by this time, I trust:—oh! what agony I have endured within the last two or three hours!" and then, passing in a moment from grave to gay, Lady Susan laughed, as she said, in a very gracious tone, "Norman, you will become a perfect lion, for this achievement; you will be *fêted*, and caressed, and——"

"Let us get Miss Clarendon better, first," said the young man, in his quiet way; "if she should think better of me for this,—but it really was a mere bagatelle, as far as I was concerned——;" and they gained the door of Miss Clarendon's boudoir.

"Thus far, and no farther," said her ladyship, with mock gravity, extending her arms, to prevent his entrance; "Norman, you must remember that Eleanor is now convalescent, and your own respect for her should——"

"I am gone," rejoined the young man, smiling; "only bring me a message, however simple, to

console me for my banishment, and I will lull myself to forgetfulness for one night with it, if I can sleep after all this éxcitement."

The message was brought: "Eleanor sent her grateful remembrances, and already felt herself recovering; and begged to assure Mr. Macdonald that he need not be under any apprehension on her account."

Nothing could be more simple than such a message; it might have been sent to fifty other people just as well, and yet none but Norman Macdonald could have extracted such precious balm from those few simple words; he, poor fellow, treasured them in his heart, murmuring them over until he fairly fell asleep, through pure exhaustion.

Jasper Vernon, too, went to bed, and slept soundly. He had a long interview with the Lady of Leven the next morning, which is of little consequence in the present narrative, and then ordered the old battered chaise, spavined hacks, and one-eyed postboy out again, and turned his face southward ho! once more.

CHAPTER III.

FOUR men, one of them with a hideous gash extending from the brow to the upper lip, which it laid completely bare, were lying half asleep around a blazing fire, the smoke of which curled up through the gigantic beech under which they were seated, on the same night that Cecil and Dalton entered Paris.

“And so the rascal has escaped our clutches again, my lads,” growled the man who, by his gigantic stature and the air of superiority he unconsciously assumed over the other three, was evidently their leader; “whoo! I felt as if I had a halter round my neck, when the puppy at the inn told me they were off to Paris. I could have put a knife into him, the whey-faced ass, for such news.”

"It's our luck, Rudd," muttered one of his companions, with a lazy yawn, as he threw himself on his back, and stared idly up at the stars overhead. "By Jove! this is a nicer bed than we'd have had in Coventry jail, as there was every prospect of our having, hadn't a lucky trick turned up to befriend us in the very nick of time."

"What's the matter with you, Bams?" demanded Rudd, carelessly, as he stirred up the blazing fagots with a stake, "you have such a snivelling, hang-dog look, as if you'd seen your father's ghost."

"To hear him," cried little Bams, with an attempted twinkle of his little, round, keen eye, holding up his hands as he spoke, "to hear him talking, one would really fancy we were all snugly housed at the fungus again, roasting, and broiling, and frying, as merrily as ever. Ah, Rudd, my dear fellow! my good Spike! worthy Jack Bunting! it's weary work looking bold, and swaggering, and rollicking, when one's belly cries out hunger, with a hundred tongues, as mine is at this moment."

A loud laugh from the whole party was the response to this pathetic appeal, and then Spike, rolling himself over to the other side, began to hum a drinking tune, whilst Bunting, more philosophically, closed his eyes, and attempted to fall asleep.

Little Bams sat up alongside of Rudd, who was gazing in moody silence at the fire, the ruddy glow of which lent a sort of Salvator Rosa wildness to the vindictive daring into which his savage and striking features seemed unconsciously to have moulded themselves. Hunger was tugging at the vitals of both; it was the same disease in both, and yet how differently did it possess them! —the one so bold, so reckless, driven by such a fatal destiny to cherish the perpetration of the foulest and most appalling deeds, the other sighing over the memory of departed feasts with lachrymose sadness, that lent a ludicrous pathos to his usually merry and careless physiognomy.

“Where is the boy, Bams?” demanded Rudd, at length, starting from his own thoughts; “he hasn’t stumped?”

“No, no! the poor little fellow is sleeping away merrily enough, I warrant, yonder,” said Bams, pointing with one hand to a sloping bank, which the glare of the fire lighted up just enough to show the recumbent figure of a young boy, who seemed to be asleep. “Poor little imp, it’ll be a weary waking for him.” •

“No whimpering, you ass,” growled Rudd, with a savage oath; “I’d wager a guinea, if I had it, he’ll be as merry with us, and lead as jolly a life, too, as if he was still tied to his mother’s apron strings.”

“What a fellow you are, Rudd!” said Bams, admiringly, “You’ll make that poor little fellow a fine fence for your own plots, or my name isn’t Bams.”

“Bah! it’s his destiny,” interrupted Rudd, sullenly, as he staggered to his feet, and crept, as noiselessly as he could, to the poor little fellow’s hard couch. He stooped down when he reached it, and his great coarse hand parted the curling brown hair that clustered in such profusion over the delicately fair, bright forehead.

Gently as he did this, it had the effect of arousing the child, who murmuring "Oh, Cecil!" opened his eyes, and then shrank away from the rude interruptor of his dreams, with a startled scream.

"Cheer up, my little cock-sparrow," cried Rudd, putting a herculean arm round his trembling form; "you're all amongst friends here, I promise ye; so cheer up, and look alive, my hearty."

A heart-breaking sob from the terrified Herbert (for it was no other) was the only response to this speech, which was the kindest Rudd had ever been known to use. Rudd seemed to be prepared for this, for he continued, in a kindly tone,—

"Are you hungry, my little fellow?"

Herbert's heart beat violently against his side, but he could not screw up courage enough to answer.

"Come, come," said the other, in a soothing tone; "it's no use blubbering and snivelling after that fashion: Bams can do that like a she-crocodile. Be a man, my little un, and let us see your blinkers a bit."

“It is so dreadfully dark,” sobbed Herbert; “and you are a very bad man, I’m afraid. You look so fierce, sir, especially when you laugh, and your eyes are so fiery that you make me cry. Oh, if dear Cecil was only with me!”

“And who is Cecil, my little man?” demanded Rudd, in a kind tone.

“My brother, sir,” answered Herbert, who felt, though he scarcely knew why, that he ought to propitiate this man, who had such fiery eyes, and looked so fierce when he laughed;—“Cecil was always so kind to me; but when poor papa died Cecil went away, and the bad man I went to live with was so cruel, that I ran away.”

“And bravely done, too, my lad,” cried the man, approvingly; “I admire your pluck, on my soul I do! you’re a lad of spirit, and if you like it, I’ll father you myself,—I’ll fill that cove Cecil’s place, and be kind to you,—by my soul I will:” and the athletic rascal patted Herbert’s pale cheek, and smoothed his curly hair, with newly inspired interest. “So now, my chaffin cove, come to the fire, and let us hear your

history, and then we'll swear to stick one by t'other through thick and thin:" and Rudd lifted Herbert up as easily as he would have done an infant, and carried him to his comrades.

"Here, my lads, is a new member to our honourable fraternity," cried he, with a laugh; "he's a young un, sartinly; but time 'll mend that fault, you know: and to make amends for it, he's got a devil of a spirit, as I for one can swear to."

"What a pretty little fellow!" whimpered Bams, who was not much taller than Herbert himself; "what do they call you, master?"

"Bah!—who cares for names?" growled Rudd, patting Herbert's back, encouragingly; "he'll make a hempen cove one of these days; and if that's his fate the mother that owns him had rather not hear his name mentioned, I fancy."

His coarse familiarity—for Herbert was too young to understand the slang in which the villain's prognostications were couched—disgusted the poor boy excessively: with an inherent caution,

however, that never deserted him, he affected not to be offended at this ; and, complaining of drowsiness, was permitted to return to his nook again, inwardly determined to make his escape, if possible, before morning.

Unfortunately, however, for the success of such a project, the utter exhaustion his frame suffered from his long flight, added to his hunger and his terrors, for the present thwarted this ; for he fell asleep long before either Rudd or Bams resigned their places at the fire ; and when he awoke he saw in the grey dawn the four men moving about, as if intending to move their quarters, prior to making their morning meal, which, judging by their hungry looks, ought to be a very ample one.

“ Come, little hemp-seed,” cried Rudd, rather impatiently ; “ we’re all on the jog ; and you must trot too, for we can’t leave you behind ; so waken up, and get on your legs, and in an hour’s time we’ll get you some breakfast.”

This was welcome news, at any rate, to Herbert, who was quite faint from fasting ; and

with a kind of desperate courage, he got up, and stretched his cramped and shivering limbs, and even suffered Rudd to lead him by the hand, as they lingered behind the other three men, who with gaunt, hunger-stricken looks, and dogged manner, trudged on in front in moody silence, rarely exchanging more than a muttered oath, as the sound of Rudd's voice broke the silence of the morning.

In a short time they came to a ford, when Rudd took Herbert in his arms, and carried him across. The boy expected to be set down again on gaining the opposite bank, but Rudd still continued to stride on, to all appearance unconscious of his burden, and Herbert, who was both stiff and foot-sore, was not sorry for the brief respite from pain this insured him. Then by degrees they emerged from the silent wood they had been hitherto traversing; the trees grew more widely apart, the smoke from some lonely cottage curled up through the clearings, the wood-cutter's axe rang sharply out in the morning air, they passed a cottage-girl with a basket, with

a white cloth covered over it, on her arm, who shrank from the four men as they passed her, and cast a look of pitying wonder on Herbert, and then they emerged upon a bleak, deserted, dreary moor, which seemed to have been stricken dead since the creation, so gloomy and desolate was its appearance.

“There’s a gibbet!” said Rudd, with a haggard smile, directing Herbert’s attention to a blackened pole and cross beam, at the end of which swung a mouldering skeleton in its iron cage. “Ha! those that make laws, and fancy poor folks have nought to do but keep ’em, should be swung up in one ’o them things, if they don’t give poor folks bread and beef and beer enough to fill their hungry bellies.”

“I wish I had some bread and beef,” said Herbert, smiling sadly; “I never felt so very, very weak before, sir.”

“I have often for days and weeks together,” growled the man, sullenly; “aye, day after day, getting up with the lark, and envying even the crow her loathsome carrion-breakfast; but you’re

only a lad, and what's the use of chaffing to you of such things."

"Did you always lead this life, sir?" demanded Herbert, whose first terrors of his grim companion were fast melting away; "I mean, did you never live like other people, in a nice house, and had servants to wait on you, and a horse, and plenty to eat and drink?"

"Yes, once I had all these, my little fellow," rejoined Rudd, with a fiendish scowl. "I was once rich, I once rolled in wealth, I was a gentleman born; but——" and he strode on again, with an oath that made Herbert's heart quake to hear it.

He was too terrified to renew the conversation, especially when he noticed how terrible was the emotion Rudd's whole frame betrayed; the sweat stood out in great drops on his swarth brow, and his lips quivered, as he dropped the boy to the ground, and told him in a hoarse whisper that he must walk now; he did not even give him his hand as before, but walked on, with his arms folded over his brawny chest, his dark eyes

flashing fire beneath his shaggy brows, muttering, apparently in a foreign language, a long string of curses and maledictions; for such they sounded to Herbert's untutored ears.

By degrees they had been advancing to the suburbs of a large town, the smoke and din of which had already attracted Herbert's attention. Rudd slouched his hat over his face, and loitered still farther behind the other three men, still contriving to keep Herbert beside him, yet not so as to attract the attention of the few early wayfarers they met. Herbert noticed, also, that the three men separated, Bams, alone, continuing to precede them, until a turn of the road shut him also out from their view, and they saw him no more at that time. Rudd still continued to walk rapidly forward, apparently indifferent to all that was passing around them, although, in reality, he kept a keen watch on every side. The district they were entering, however, seemed to Herbert to be a very poor one, for nothing but filth and desolation met his gaze on every side,—haggard men, and pallid women, half-starved brats, and

yelping dogs, jostled them at every step, until Herbert, who was still proud and fastidious in himself, shrank back in dismay, and would have fairly run away, had he not felt Rudd's vigilant eye fixed upon him.

At length, after many a weary turn, Rudd turned down by the side of a canal, the sluggish waters of which sent up a fetid and putrid odour into the smoky atmosphere. Poverty-stricken as was the quarter they had heretofore traversed, this was infinitely worse; here, want, and poverty, and crime, had stamped their bitter impress even on the very buildings themselves, which stood out like so many blackened spectres against the dull grey sky, as if they formed the dreary portals to the infernal regions.

After walking through this dismal rookery for some time, the very inhabitants of which flitted about like so many disembodied spirits, Rudd turned down a narrow alley, and presently entered a dark, dingy room, dragging Herbert roughly after him.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN rose up from the darkest corner, as they entered, and stood in the centre of the room, without approaching nearer. Herbert cast a hurried glance at her, as Rudd exchanged a few words with her, in a tone much too low for him to catch what was said; the glance by no means reassured him.

She was gaunt in figure and haggard in features; her dark, eager eyes were sunk far back in her head, her cheek bones projected far out from the surrounding cheeks, and there was a spasmodic writhing of the jaws, that either betrayed intense mental agitation or internal pain; her complexion was perfectly sallow, and her dress sordid in the extreme.

“Has Grimes come back, Bess?” said Rudd,

raising his voice, after the hurried colloquy referred to, "he should have been here by this."

"Should he?" she demanded, looking anxiously at Rudd, and then glancing furtively to Herbert, "I have not seen him yet."

Rudd's countenance fell for a moment, and then recovering himself he said, "Well, it's no matter, he'll turn up in the course of the morning, I'll swear, perhaps he had some business of his own to attend to; get us some breakfast immediately—here, my little fellow, you can wash yourself in here," and he preceded Herbert to an out-house, where a broken basin and piece of villainous soap stood on a three-legged stool; "come back as soon as you've done," and then returning, he went up to the woman again.

"And so you've failed again, Rudd," muttered she with stern bitterness, laying down the loaf she was in the act of cutting, and fixing her hollow eyes upon his reckless face; "did I not tell you when you came to seek us last time, that a curse came with you—you come back empty

handed as you went, and but just escaped the gallows into the bargain."

"And what if we have, Bess?" rejoined Rudd, doggedly, as he stood confronting her with his herculean frame, "and what if we have failed, my lass?—one venture does not always bring good luck."

"It has nearly brought the hangman to us, I fancy," rejoined the woman, firmly: "but who is the young fool you've brought with you this morning?"

"God only knows; we picked him up on the high road yesterday, a couple of miles from B——; he won't blab anything, so that we haven't the slightest clue to finding out where he comes from."

The woman's dark eyes glittered as she said, "And you intend to make him a——"

"Whisht—here's Bams, and Spike, and Bunting; I'll tell you all afterwards," and then throwing himself upon a rude settle, he welcomed the three men, as they severally entered, with a low peculiar whistle, to which Spike responded.

When Herbert slunk back again, he found the rickety table already covered with the materials for breakfast; the woman cast a pitying glance upon him as he entered, and even smoothed his curly hair over his forehead, as she placed a basin before him, and gave him a seat next to Rudd.

“Here, my chaffin cove,” said the ruffian, with a gruff laugh, shoving a mess of milk and bread towards him, “a hungry belly, like thine, I’ll warrant me, will be glad to stomach even such trash as that, sorry as it is.”

Nothing but the poor lad’s intense hunger could, indeed, have made him relish the unpalatable mess: as it was, however, he devoured it with a rapidity that astonished even himself, but, not all Rudd’s rough hospitality, nor the woman’s gentler entreaties, could induce him to partake of more, and complaining of fatigue, he was permitted to throw himself upon the settle, and was soon forgotten by the other hungry sitters round the board.

“The bottomless pit is mere fudge to your maw, Spike,” said Rudd, with a hoarse laugh;

“one might throw a cartload of paving stones in, and you’d still find room for a pretty decent meal after that was done.”

“Faith, and to my mind, a man may well eat after fasting a good twenty-four hours, as I’ve done, Rudd,” rejoined Spike, surlily; “it’s not your meat, I fancy, I’m eating.”

“No, no! you’re always red hot to fasten a quarrel on me,” retorted Rudd.

“Because you bait me as a bulldog does a badger,” returned Spike, with a ferocious gleam in his grey eyes, “but I’d have you remember that a badger can bite, Jack.”

“I know that, to my cost, my lad,” was Rudd’s reply, “but let’s drop the subject. Can any of you divine what’s become of Grimes?”

The woman had by this time sat down in front of the fire, with her jaws resting upon her hands, gazing vacantly into the grate: the question, however, aroused her, and her face assumed a more vigilant expression as she listened, without appearing to do so, to the conversation.

“He can’t have got trapped,” said little Bams,

"oh no, no! Grimes was too 'cute a fellow for that."

"Perhaps he's hit on some plan, and stopped behind to work it out," suggested Bunting, "Grimes is a long headed chap."

Spike shook his head, as he said, "After our escape yesterday morning, Grimes would naturally drop down as snugly as possible to his own lair, and yet, Bess says she's seen nothing of him."

The woman moved uneasily on her seat, but did not interrupt the conversation.

"Well, I hope he hasn't got into 'trouble," resumed Rudd, trying to look confident, "but Grimes always was an unlucky fellow all his life."

Bess shuddered, and shrunk still closer into herself, as she wondered to herself where the wretched man, who was her husband, could be—anywhere but at home at such a time, she prayed he might be—even in prison, so that he might escape the clutches of such a band.

The hope had scarcely formed itself in her

mind, before a step was heard at the door, and Grimes stood amongst them.

His slouched hat, his lank, rusty hair, his foxy whiskers, every fold of his threadbare costume, from the handkerchief, twisted like a hay-wisp round his lean neck, to the patched and leaky boots he wore, reeking with wet; hunger gleaming from his cold, blue eyes; hunger stamped in every wrinkle of his pinched and furrowed visage, on his raw, hungry nose, on his blue lips, his sharp chin,—stamped even on his bony fingers and his slinking form; mud clinging to his miserable trousers, and standing out in patches even on his reeking coat! Such was the wretched man with whom Rudd and his companions were banded together.

“How long have you been here, pals?” was his first inquiry, as he threw himself, like a famished wolf, on the remains of the breakfast, without noticing his wretched wife; “I dare not venture into the high road till daylight had past, and then slunk home like a hunted wolf.”

“We’ve only been an hour or so here,” was

Rudd's rejoinder, "but we acted differently to you;—we travelled in the daytime, and slept by night."

"You did!" exclaimed the other, turning up his eyes.—"Rudd, you've the impudence of a fiend, or you'd never venture to such lengths; but, however, if I was longer in turning up, I've managed to pick up a bit of news,—you know who,—" and a jerk of his hand cked out the hint; "the gentleman we went to visit a night or two ago."

"Go on, you fool," roared Rudd, foaming at the mouth with impatience; "I understand you, you drivelling ass;—what of him, I say?"

"Patience, for a minute," said Grimes, coolly; "d'ye think a fellow's to be browbeat and buffeted in this way?—he's off to Paris, that's all.—Yes, that's the name, for I took particular notice, and spelt it over to myself to fix in my mind."

"And who told you this, you croaking owl?" roared Rudd, striking the table with his clenched fist.

“Bah! you needn’t work yourself up in that way, Rudd,” said Spike, joining in the conversation, which until now had been entirely carried on by the two men; “if the bird’s flown, it’s none of our fault, you know.”

Rudd started up from his seat, and then sank back again, and his countenance, from being frightfully distorted, grew suddenly pale. Spike eyed this demonstration with a taunting smile, that made his antagonist’s mastery over himself the more difficult to maintain; he did so, however, and with a calmness that astonished every one, turned to Grimes again, and said in a hoarse whisper—

“Where and how did you come by this news?”

“Nothing could be simpler. Last night, when it was darkening, I was prowling in the stable-yard of the Blue Boar, at B——, wondering where I could get a belly-full, when a carriage and four drove up with Dal——I mean him in it; fresh horses were ordered out, and away they went again, without stopping, and I heard the hostler and a helper, who came into the stable

where I was hid, say that he was off to Paris with a young man."

"And I wasn't there!" groaned Rudd, quivering with baffled rage; "I'd have given life itself—it's all I've left now—to have been in your place, Grimes. Hang the ill-luck that dogs me, go where I will, and now he's escaped me altogether."

"Unless you follow him to Paris, my lad," said Spike, sneeringly; "you may catch him there."

Rudd's face was hid by his hands, so that they could not see the effect this taunt had upon him. A dead silence followed, broken only by a convulsive groan, that seemed to issue at intervals from the very depths of Rudd's heart, and whenever it was heard they all noticed that his strong frame quivered, and his head was drawn down, as if by some unseen power, upon his chest, whilst the four men sate around in wonder, not even Spike daring to interrupt this wild gust of passion and despair.

Suddenly he sat up erect, with a stern smile imprinted on his face, as pale as that of a dead

man; by a mighty effort he had conquered even himself, but the writhing lip, the rolling eye, and the ghastly pallor of his face, told how dearly was it purchased. Even the smile that hovered around his features could not hide the stern revenge that showed itself like an under-current of action beneath the surface, and he trembled as he said, "My revenge will come; but get your breakfast, Grimes, and then we'll talk of other matters."

"Whose brat is that in the corner?" demanded the other, for the first time directing his attention to Herbert, who lay apparently undisturbed amidst all this wild uproar, buried in sleep; "where did you pick him up?"

"Hush, Grimes," said Rudd, laying his finger on his lips; "don't speak so loud."

"Why, you've been roaring like a mad bull, Jack," cried Spike, with a loud, coarse laugh, "and now, when you've changed your mood, and begin to pipe small, you won't speak above a cat's whisper."

"You're safe for this time, Spike," said Rudd,

affecting not to notice the truth of the other's remark; "but is it not strange that poor little fellow should lie so quiet there, and here we've been shouting and talking like so many mad fools about him—how sound the poor fellow sleeps, my lads!"

"I believe he's shamming," growled Spike.

"No, no—he couldn't."

"Couldn't he—hang it! I'm sure of it."

"Bah!"

"What would you bet, Rudd?"

"He shan't be disturbed, and so that's enough," cried Rudd, folding his arms over his brawny chest;—"I say it again, he shan't be touched, and it's at your peril, or any man's peril, to do so."

Spike laughed tauntingly—he was jealous of Rudd's presumed superiority, and took every opportunity of piquing him—and said, "d'ye think I dar' not satisfy myself whether the little ass is really shamming, or not, Jack?"

"No, you dare not,—I'll stake my life, he is asleep."

"Here goes then," cried Spike, springing from his chair, towards the settle, but before he could move three steps, Rutld's gigantic frame was interposed between him and the object of his scrutiny, and the latter, winding his arms round his antagonist's much less powerful frame, fairly lifted him from his feet, and carried him back to his scat, with the greatest ease.

"I needn't go to see myself," said he, with a parting hug, that made the discomfited Spike pant for breath, as Herbert, rubbing his eyes, sate up erect before them; "Holloa! my little cock sparrow, are you fresh and hearty again, after your snooze?"

"Yes, sir,—who are all these men?" was Herbert's first question.

"Friends of mine," was the response; "this gentleman," pointing to Grimes, "has just come from a journey—but lie down again, and sleep if you can, for we must be off again in the afternoon."

Herbert wondered, whether he could escape from the society of these terrible men, before

that time, but thinking it better to appear to acquiesce in the suggestion, lay down again, though he did not again fall asleep.

In the meantime, the men drew round the fire, and began to smoke in silence—Grimes lay down on a wretched bed in one corner, and soon fell fast asleep, whilst the woman, having cleared away the breakfast things, ascended by a ladder, into the loft above, and did not again make her appearance for a considerable time.

Dinner passed over, and still no one seemed disposed to leave their present quarters, — Herbert, whose boyish fears began to predominate over the courage that had hitherto supported him, began to give way to despair; he felt as if it were an impossibility to escape from the surveillance of these men, every one of whom his alarmed imagination depicted in the most frightful colours, and who evidently were retaining him amongst them for some guilty purpose; he durst not allow his imagination to divine what this latter might be, and the more vague and intangible were the conjectures his

mind assumed, the more and more unhappy did he become.

As the night drew on, Bams and Spike slunk out, and were presently followed by the man Grimes, who shortly after returned, and after whispering to Rudd, for some moments, in an eager tone, again went away, accompanied by the latter and Bunting. There were now none but the woman and Herbert remaining, and with a throbbing heart, the latter watched every movement of his companion, who was now occupied in her task of putting the miserable room into some sort of order.

More than once the poor boy felt impelled to throw himself upon her compassion, especially when he detected her occasionally eyeing him with an emotion, that he was quite ready to interpret into one of pity; but then, the dread, indefinable fear of failing to excite her pity, deterred him from such a step; it would arouse all her vigilance, should he fail to do so, and then escape would be impossible.

At last her employment seemed to have come

to an end, and resuming her ordinary place before the fire, she rested her chin on the palms of her hands, rocking herself gently, backwards and forwards, whilst her great mournful eyes were fixed on the smouldering turf, muttering at intervals to herself, and then sighing heavily, as she resumed the rocking movement her wretched cogitations at times seemed to interrupt.

Herbert watched her for a long time in silence, he even held his breath lest that might recall him to her memory; she seemed utterly to have forgotten him, so completely so, in fact, that tears were stealing silently down her haggard countenance, in a manner that showed how completely she fancied herself to be alone.

It was strange that the boy felt more terrified by the society of this lonely and grief-stricken woman, than he had ever done in the company of the reckless ruffians, with whom he had spent the preceding night. There was something so appalling in the very loneliness that surrounded them, broken only by the dull crackling of the

embers in the grate, that his very heart died within him; the attitude of grief, too, his companion had assumed, her wild, black, dishevelled hair, falling unconfined over her swarth, sallow face and heaving bosom, the deep corroding despair that was stamped on her gaunt, hunger-stricken, visage, and the heavy sighs that burst from her breast, were enough to fill much more courageous beings with fear.

And then glancing round, silently and stealthily, to survey the apartment, with its barricadoed window, the pair of bludgeons hung over the fire-place, the plaster falling from the blackened laths, the smoky roof, the lurid light emitted by the fire, and the gloom that enveloped everything remote; everything wild, and improbable, and appalling, that he had ever heard of, or read, rushed upon his mind, and drove him well-nigh to despair.

Gradually, the wretched creature who sate before him, seemed to lose all recollection of surrounding objects; her head sank on her breast, her hands were folded over her knees, she ceased

to rock backwards and forwards and even to sigh, and Herbert dared to hope that she slept.

To test this he ventured to drop his knife beside her chair, but she did not stir; stooping noiselessly to recover it, he heard her gentle and measured breathing, which assured him that she was in reality asleep, and delighted with the discovery, he crept to the edge of the settle, and took off the shoes he had until this moment worn.

Still the woman slept, her black hair streaming over her care-worn face, and still Herbert watched her: it would have struck any one with surprise, could they have looked, by any chance, into that room, at that moment, and beheld the scene it presented; the school-boy with his beautifully chiselled face, so pale, so determined, gazing wistfully over to the wild looking being with whom he was associated, his beautiful fair hair shading his broad calm brow, and the traces of tears still visible on his cheeks; the woman like one of the terrible creations of physical and mental despair in one of Retschz's compositions, all misery and woe.

But a change seemed to creep over her, as she sat before him. A cold shivering ran through her veins; her head was thrown convulsively back, until the sinews of her throat stood out in bold relief from the fleshless bones; and then Herbert saw that her eyes were glassy and fixed, and that no light shone in them. She was still asleep, he knew, although she suddenly started up, as rigid as if every limb and sinew were twisted iron; her black hair fell over her gaunt shoulders; her blue lips were apart, but no sound proceeded from them; and, before the boy could divine whether it was terror or curiosity that now swayed him, she moved across the floor like some terrible apparition, and opening a door that so closely resembled the wall around it that, in the obscurity of the whole place, he had not before perceived it, passed through.

The boy followed, as if impelled to do so by some unseen power. They were now in a long, dark passage, which was so narrow that by extending his hands he could touch both the opposite walls at the same moment. Still the

woman glided on, with Herbert behind, until they came to another door, which was open; and then a long, winding flight of steps presented itself before them. Round and round they wound, until Herbert felt giddy and sick; and still the woman crept on, until they reached a narrow gallery, around which ran a narrow railing. The walls were disposed in niches, which had at one time contained the figures of holy saints; but their pedestals were now vacant; and then, as if exhausted with her efforts, the woman sank down on one of these, apparently without awaking.

A light seemed to rise up from below, and Herbert, with secret awe, creeping to the edge, peeped through the railing, and then started back in astonishment. The place to which his strange guide had insensibly conducted him was domed at the top, near the roof of which (so near that he could have touched the slope of the ceiling with his hand) a rude gallery had been thrown; and from this Herbert looked down upon the wild and lawless scene beneath, spread out like an act

in a theatre, or the changing scenes of a vivid panorama.

A circular apartment displayed itself to his view, in the centre of which stood a small furnace, round which were grouped some eight or ten wild, reckless-looking villains, amongst whom the man called Rudd, by his superior stature, was plainly distinguishable. A dozen or more of thick, black, guttering candles were placed in sconces round the room, beneath which rude benches were placed, and the light of these, added to that of the singularly constructed stove, brought out in strange relief the bold and lawless band assembled therein.

The blackened walls had other strange tools displayed around them, which the boy, in his terror failed to discover the use of; in fact, his whole attention was absorbed by the real actors in the scene, one and all of whom worked away with unceasing indefatigability, the noise of their operations, the quick yet subdued shuffling of feet, the sharp click of hammers, and the opening and closing of the stove-doors, alone breaking the

silence that prevailed. What astonished him more than all the rest was, that not a word was exchanged amongst them; not even a syllable was heard; and except that occasionally the whole band gathered around Rudd, and, with eager looks, watched his countenance whilst he scrutinized and tested the result of their operations, each seemed to work independently of his neighbour, and formed an individual and isolated part of the whole drama.

They all wore dark cloth caps, the peaks of which were turned back upon the back of the neck, thus displaying to view the variety of feature and complexion each man possessed. The very idlest of them displayed a dogged determination and resolution, that bespoke their occupation to be a lawless one, long before Herbert's eye fell upon three heavy bludgeons disposed over the strong, heavily barred door, which were ready at hand, should any interruption occur to them in the prosecution of their labours.

Frightened as Herbert was, he could notice even the most minute of these details, for in

moments of great excitement the mind, as it were, vividly seizes upon and retains circumstances which in calmer moments pass unheeded, or, if slightly noticed, are soon forgotten. He could even perceive that each man had his own department to superintend, and that no one interfered with his neighbour, and that all implicitly obeyed the superior direction of Rudd, who issued his directions by signals, for no conversation was exchanged amongst them.

Suddenly the woman arose from the recess into which she had sunk, and again approached the door by which they had entered. Herbert darted another glance down upon the striking scene below, just as one man threw something bright and shining from a mould upon one of the benches, around which the whole band instantly crowded; and then, with the same noiseless step, crept after his sleeping guide. The winding staircase was soon descended, and the passage traversed in safety, and in a short time he again found himself in the dark and confined room which had formed his prison during the day.

The woman's trance still continued. With the same measured step that characterised her movements on leaving the room, did she again resume her seat before the fire. Her head sank down upon her breast, her hands once more clasped her knees, her black hair even seemed to fall in the same heavy folds, like a funeral pall, over her vacant features.

CHAPTER V.

Now was his moment for escape ; the woman was insensible ; Rudd and his associates were absent on their strange and lawless calling ; everything seemed to favour his enterprise, and instinctively falling on his knees, he breathed a hurried prayer to God, and then crept as noiseless as a shadow to the door.

It was heavily barred, and had two massive bolts, one at the top and the other at the bottom, which shot into a groove of a peculiar formation, and were evidently the production of one of the numerous gang who were his present jailers.

Herbert, with a forethought beyond his years, had anticipated this, and was therefore prepared for it. Carefully returning to the other end of the room, he espied an old-fashioned carving-

fork, the strong prongs of which he fancied would enable him to shoot the bolts in silence, and procuring a chair at the same moment, conveyed it across the room to the door ; then he listened in breathless attention, to discover if possible if anything threatened to interrupt his attempt.

Nothing stirred ; the fire had blazed up now, and the whole room, in all its sordid and squalid poverty and disorder, was revealed to his eyes. There was the woman, still sitting before the fire, and as he listened, his quick ear caught her calm and regular respiration ; all sounds had long since died away in the street, for it was long past midnight now ; and, with a firm grasp, the boy lifted the first heavy bar out of its socket, and laid it down noiselessly on the window sill beside him.

In doing so he discovered, to his great joy, the ponderous key he had seen the woman take from the lock, soon after the men who had accompanied Rudd had left the house. The formidable key grated with a dull, sonorous sound in the wards, and, scarcely trusting his own luck, he again paused, with a palpitating heart, lest this latter

movement should have aroused the she-Cerberus beside him.

Reassured by her quiescence that such was not the case, he again resumed his task, and succeeded, after a great deal of exertion, and not a little pain to his aching hands and wrists in withdrawing the bolts. It was an easy task to remove the remaining bar, and then resting on the corner of the chair, he wiped the sweat from his brow, and took breath ere he ventured upon his flight.

Suddenly, a sound burst upon his ear: now, distant like the murmur of some far-away mountain stream that scarcely breaks upon the silence of a summer's-day: and then, like the same stream swollen with winter rains, it grew, and grew as it approached. Sick with apprehension, the boy lifted the chair noiselessly away, and opened the door a little ajar. The noise grew louder in an instant. Ten—fifty—the tramp of a hundred men—broke upon his ear: he crept out a yard or two; it was as if a thousand men were approaching, with the speed of a whirlwind, the place he stood upon.

Then the whole neighbourhood awoke as if by magic. The approaching multitude were sweeping down the narrow street, and meeting these came others rushing madly forward, some nearly naked, with their tangled hair giving a horrible ferociousness to countenances that were dark, and determined, and repulsive enough without: women with children in their arms, in their begrimed night-clothes, with inflamed visages and flashing eyes, the harpies of that den of crime and iniquity; men armed with bludgeons and crowbars, in every degree of age; all shouting, yelling, and swearing, and with a thousand evil passions stamped on every cut-throat visage, until the very stones beneath seem to swarm up with life, as alley, and cellar, and blind streets sent out their myriads of living men and women.

Lights flashed from every window, in every house within view; cries of terror and threats of vengeance, were mingled in one horrible jargon, that almost made the blood curdle to hearken to; heads were thrust out at attic windows, dusky forms flitted to and fro along the crazy balconies,

that still hung out like blackened shells of former grandeur, as they were, at intervals around him; men hung over the parapets of the lower houses; and eager faces with flashing eyes, and sharpened chins, peered over upon the crowd below. The boy stood rooted to the spot; strong as had been his desire for escape but a moment ago, he could not now have done so for the world. He forgot even himself in the wild, turbulent scene before him, and became, as it were, a participator in its tragedy.

The torrent—for such it might well be called—which had called from their lairs this teeming world of ruffianism and guilt, had now gained the spot where he stood, and then Herbert, in some sort, had the mystery solved for him. In front were the band of coiners, whose operations he had so singularly beheld at their secret calling in the base of the tower, all mixed wildly together, armed with bludgeons, the butt-ends of which now acted as their means of defence against a numerous body of night police, who were advancing in a compact and sufficiently formidable

body upon them, armed with gleaming cutlasses, the deadly blades of which had already inflicted more than one visible wound upon the flying yet still fighting band, who had thus brought upon themselves the vengeance of the law.

Nothing could possibly be more exciting, and yet more dramatic than the appearance of the scene at this moment. Torches flashed and flickered as they were passed from hand to hand, now lighting up a group of wild, anxious faces, all pale with passion or fear; and anon, in their fitful progress, obliterating the strange picture, only to produce another at the next moment in another place; cutlasses and bludgeons rose up above the dark sea of heads, as their possessors strove to reach the scene of action. Stentorian lungs roared out threats of intimidation against the assailants; whilst others as vehemently cheered the small, yet determined band, in whose persons the whole neighbourhood thus saw themselves attacked. It was but an attack of the police upon a gang of thieves, carried into their very dens, and yet how wild, and lurid, and striking was

the picture Herbert had thus exhibited before him!

The police, well armed* and disciplined as they were, were by no means secure of their victims. Hemmed in on every side by foes, with thieves swarming up around them, move where they would, they had need of all their experience of such adventures, and all their cold-blooded disregard of danger, however imminent, to carry them through at such a moment. And thus on they came with drawn hangers, as closely packed as a regiment of soldiers, and then* when the coiners found themselves thus suddenly reinforced, they also turned, and gave them battle.

As if by some preconcerted stratagem, the women, who had by no means formed the least lawless portion of the defendants, became separated from the men; and the latter, variously armed or unarmed, as the case might be, except with heavy cudgels, rushed forwards towards the house of the man Grimes, which on this occasion formed the *point d'appui*, thus swelling the ranks of the coining gang. The herculean form of the

reckless Rudd was in a moment seen to assume the direction of this augmented force, and with a loud cry for vengeance, led on by this savage ruffian, the whole posse flung themselves on their assailants.

For a moment the latter reeled beneath the shock ; but the admirable discipline they were controlled by, came to their aid, and they, in their turn, swept upon the foe. Herbert, who had become entangled amongst the assailants, was swept forward amongst the rest, almost in contact with the ruffian Rudd, whose herculean arm dealt terrible slaughter wherever he stirred. Crushed, and terror-stricken, and almost dead with sudden pain, the boy presently felt himself carried back again, as the gang of thieves retreated before their assailants, and scarcely knowing how, knew that he was being swept into the dark room he had so recently escaped from, and then became insensible.

CHAPTER VI.

AND whilst Jasper Vernon weaves his subtle webs, to entangle Eleanor Clarendon in the meshes of love; whilst the proud old mistress of Leven watches over and fans the flame that is already kindling in the breasts of Norman and Eleanor; and whilst Herbert is hurried onward by his evil genius adown the yawning gulf, which reflects no glimmering star to warn him of the danger that lurks below; let us turn to another of the characters whose fortunes have, in some measure, been developed in these pages, and behold Cecil Clarendon's *début* in Paris.

Paris!—the gay, the flippant, the elegant, the abandoned! Paris, whose every-day life is but a scene from the last extravagant *vaudeville* of the *Opera Comique*! Paris, so theatrically chivalrous,

so refined, so gross, so licentious, a mixture of earth and heaven,—and hell!

And Cecil was in this scene of contrarities. Cecil was in Paris. Dalton's princely house in the Chausse d'Antin was his home. Accompanied by Dalton, he visited all that was grand, and beautiful, and strange, in this land of wonders. With Dalton he lingered, spell-bound, in the princely Louvre, where France crowns herself in her artists. With Dalton he went to the Chamber of Deputies, and beheld the patriots of France, the spume and offspring of twenty revolutions, quarrelling over the miserable wreck of her greatness. With Dalton he wandered through the gardens of the Tuilleries, and the lovely alleys of Versailles. With Dalton he went to the operas and the theatres, which are the true mirrors in which the Parisians glass themselves. He even pierced, with his bold-hearted guide, the myriads of wretched hovels in which want, and crime, and poverty conceal themselves; and, whilst relieving the misery he had there presented to his gaze, left those dreary receptacles of human degrada-

tion, with a heart chastened to adoration and love for that Almighty Being who had cast his lot so much more happily.

That house in the Chausse d'Antin, as if lit up into a brighter existence by its master's presence, awoke, as if by magic, from the trance that possessed it, and became, almost in a moment, the rendezvous of all that was *distingué* in the world of fashion and talent. The *salons* that so long remained with closed shutters, through which the grey light fell lingeringly on draped furniture, and statues, and reversed paintings, now glittered with lights, and rung with music and the busy hum of a hundred tongues. The old *porte-cochère* rang once more with the arrival of eager guests, as carriage after carriage drove up, and deposited their cargo of wit, and beauty, and breeding: for Dalton was a millionaire, and in Paris, as elsewhere, or even more potently there than anywhere else, gold has the power of attracting to its magic neighbourhood all that is rare and priceless in rank, and birth, and talent.

And yet we are digressing. On the morning

succeeding their arrival, a small party of four were lingering over a late breakfast in that portion of the house which, by an unusual arrangement, was more particularly under the control of Mrs. Dalton. The meal had been prolonged more than such meals usually are, partly because it is so pleasant to loiter over that idlest of meals, when the coffee is delicious and the rasped rolls are crisp, and partly because Dalton and Cecil were like pilgrims from a distant land to the two secluded females who were their companions.

Of the latter, the wife of Dalton claims the first introduction. Her grey hairs, and the subdued air of resignation that accompanied all her actions, would have pronounced her to be more advanced in the vale of years, than the exquisite fairness of her unwrinkled features, the bright flashing eye, and the vivacity of her voice, would otherwise seem to indicate. And yet, when you glanced at her again, you felt that it must have been some great grief, some sudden and hidden sorrow, preying upon a mind of the loftiest order, that had mingled the white hairs amongst those

tresses, black as the raven's wing, and cast an air of languor over that beautiful form. And then, when the cheery accents of the musical voice rang in your ear once more, you felt that she still was a woman whose life was in its prime, and you marvelled no longer at the bright eye and the fair skin.

On their first meeting, this estimable woman had folded Cecil in her arms, with all the long-repressed affection of a mother who has not for years beheld an only son ; and then, putting him from her once more, she surveyed him eagerly from head to foot, noting the manly grace of his figure, his features, his complexion, and then, embracing him once more, kissed his forehead and cheeks, and pressing Dalton's hand, murmured, " Let us thank God, my friend, for all his goodness."

During all this while, the charming Camilla, a lively *soubrette* of eighteen summers, stood pouting her dewy lip, apart, yet still close enough to make a fourth in the graceful group that surrounded Cecil Clarendon. Now, however, Dalton pre-

sented the young man to his daughter, saying as he did so, "Camilla, my love, I am sure you will reciprocate the affection Cecil already feels for you."

Camilla's dewy lip pouted as she said, in a musical voice, "That, papa, would indeed be love at first sight."

"And why not, Camilla? I love Cecil almost as much as you, for he is the son of my oldest friend and benefactor."

"Mr. Cecil Clarendon is doubly welcome," said the beautiful Camilla, lifting for the first time her eyes from the ground, to fix them upon the young man's glowing and ingenuous countenance.

"Well said, Mademoiselle," rejoined Dalton, gravely, "I am sure, when you know him more intimately——"

Camilla made a mock curtsy, through all the pretended gravity of which Cecil could detect the lively grey eyes dart a sarcastic glance at himself, and ran out of the room, singing *La Charmante Gabrielle*, in a voice as fresh and musical as a bird's.

Dalton sat down to the table again beside his wife, who took his hand in her own. The fond, yet faithful wife, gazed with a wistful eye on the stern, commanding brow, and dark visage of him, whom, although linked to him by the tenderest of ties, she so little understood.

Dalton's stern brow was gathered into an ominous frown, and his usually abrupt, yet frank bearing was at once moody and sullen, as he turned from her silent, yet affectionate scrutiny, and eyed Cecil, who, quite unconscious of observation, stood in a graceful attitude at the long, narrow window, gazing upon the scene without. In another moment, the current of Dalton's thoughts seemed to change, and, assuming an air of gaiety, he said,—

“Come, Alice, let us order the carriage, and drive round the Champs Elysées.”

“So early, love?” was the gentle response.

“The earlier the better, I think,” was the rejoinder. “Cecil will have a better opportunity of seeing everything as we go along, than when the crowd of idlers fills every nook and corner

later on. So off with you, and bid Camilla change her dress with as little delay as possible."

With Mrs. Dalton, her husband's will was law ; so she immediately arose and left the room, to prepare for the excursion. Dalton then rang, and ordered the *maitre d'hotel* to order the carriage. Precisely as the pendule of the clock over the chimney-piece struck the hour of eleven, Mrs. Dalton and her daughter entered the room, and at the same moment her carriage, drawn by four splendid greys, swept up to the door.

As Cecil went up to Camilla, to conduct her down stairs, he could not disguise from himself what a charming creature it was his good fortune to be thrown into the society of, at a time when his own country seemed to cast him off as an incumbrance. The airy little bonnet set with such fantastic coquettishness on the head, its light hue in such excellent keeping with its fair wearer's brilliant complexion : her lively features dimpling with smiles, and her mischievous grey eyes glancing in fifty different directions almost at the same moment, with her airy figure, as

light and elegant as that of a fawn, made her altogether so fascinating, that Cecil soon found himself fairly bewitched by her spells, and in imminent danger of falling over head and ears in love with her, out of hand.

To fortify himself against such a danger, he recurred to the image of Eleanor, as she looked and moved on the morning of his departure from Delaval; but the contrast, whilst it made Eleanor's image the dearer to him, only brought out Camilla's vivacity and sprightliness in a stronger light, and thus matters grew worse and worse for our hero.

Truth to tell, Cecil and Camilla were left entirely to their own society, for Dalton and his wife, occupying one seat of the open carriage, were already engaged in earnest conversation, which even Camilla did not dare to break; and as for Cecil, he felt too much fascinated by the society of his new friend, to wish to throw a colder barrier of reserve betwixt them.

"Were you ever in England, Miss Dalton?" said he, as they were returning home by the

Faubourgs, anxious to see if she could converse on grave as easily and gracefully as on gay topics.

“Never but once,” was the response; “and, singularly enough, I have forgotten every event of my visit but that of being taken by papa to Delaval, to see Colonel Clarendon.”

“And you actually remember Delaval?” cried Cecil, in a delighted tone, gazing eagerly on the seriously playful face of Camilla; and then, as the recollection of that home of so many happy years, shut up and deserted, came across his mind, he added in a saddened tone, “ah! if you saw it now, you would not recognise it.”

“Is it so much changed?”

“Very, very much. But you must have been very young at the time, for I don’t recollect your visit.”

“It is a long time ago, and you were at school, I believe, at the time. But long ago as it is, the picture remains with me as vivid as if it happened only yesterday.”

“She can be sad at times,” thought Cecil,

cyeing the half sorrowful expression of Camilla's countenance, as she said the last few words; and then, turning the conversation on other topics, he soon grew gay himself.

As he sprang out upon the marble steps, to hand Camilla and Mrs. Dalton into the vestibule, his eye fell upon the form of a young man, who seemed from that place to have been awaiting the return of the family. Cecil instinctively drew back, whilst Dalton cried out,—

“Ha, Melville! is that you, my boy? Glad to see you. How long have you been from Vienna?”

“Only a week,” was the young man's rejoinder, as he handed Camilla from her seat. “I had despatches from our ambassador, as you probably know, and didn't let the ground cool beneath me;” and then, with easy nonchalance, he entered into a lively dispute with Camilla, as they ascended the steps.

Cecil was yet too recently known to Dalton's daughter to feel jealous of this new opponent; even his habitual phlegm, however, could not

prevent his noticing the evident satisfaction her countenance betrayed on discovering Mr. Melville, and his ears still rang with the eager tones with which the pair who preceded him, carried on the light and graceful persiflage which seemed to be a fit exponent of Camilla's versatile character.

Dalton seemed to read his thoughts, for, on regaining the house, he drew Cecil's arm within his own, and carried him off to the library. He had scarcely shut the door before, motioning the young man ~~to~~ a seat, he said in his own decisive manner,—

“My dear Cecil, I have never until this moment inquired how you were situated with regard to money matters, because, until this time, I thought myself vigilant enough to prevent anything of the kind being required of you. Excuse my now asking in one word, that you will do me the favour of being your banker until you come of age.”

And so saying, Dalton placed a cheque-book in Cecil's hands.

His protector's words recalled to Cecil's recollection his own want of funds; but his natural pride and independence prompted him at once gracefully to decline such an offer.

"Your manner convinces me that I only anticipate your necessities, my dear lad," said Dalton, laughing gaily; "so come, do oblige me by such a trifling concession on your part."

"When I tell you frankly," said Cecil, grasping Dalton's sinewy fingers, which still strove to force the book upon him, "that, with the exception of a few notes I had by me at the time of my departure from Delaval, I set off from home totally unprovided for in a pecuniary point of view, you will, I am certain, quite absolve me from declining such an offer from any superfluity of cash."

"Then why, Cecil, do you refuse the proffer?" said Dalton, flinging himself back in his chair, and surveying the young man with a broad stare of incredulity; "do you really expect to live in such a place as Paris without cash?"

"Certainly not. And yet I feel strangely

repugnant to taking what I have no right to, even when offered by you, Dalton."

"Then allow me to 'lend it," was the kind retort. "Draw upon me for any amount, and repay it when convenient to yourself, after you come of age. If it is not paid fifty years hence, I shan't grieve for it. Only take it, Cecil, in the way I offer it."

"To convince you that it is not a false pride which has induced me to decline such a generous offer so long," said Cecil, "I will take you at your word, and promise to use as much of your money as I want."

"And don't be afraid of punishing me, Cecil," said Dalton, slapping his *protégé* on the back, as he arose. "I can assure you, Paris is the very place for running away with one's *louis d'ors*; and I shouldn't like the son of my old friend to cut a shabby appearance, merely because he has the ill luck to have an old skinflint curmudgeon of a guardian, who grudges the sons of the man who made him, a share of their own wealth. And now come and be introduced to Melville."

On returning to Camilla's boudoir, they found the latter on the point of taking leave.

"Do you not dine with us to-day, John?" demanded Dalton, good-humouredly, placing himself in front of his retreating guest. "Come, we shall be a small party, —only Mr. Cecil Clarendon and ourselves."

"A son of Colonel Clarendon's?" exclaimed the other, turning full upon Cecil, with an eager expression of countenance.

"The very same: the eldest son," said Dalton, emphatically. "Your parents were friends in their youth, and though events in after life separated them, I know they always cherished a mutual affection for each other. So now there's another inducement for you to stay with us."

"And yet I must say no," rejoined his guest, dropping Cecil's hand. "I am engaged to the count, and must beg off to-day. Mr. Cecil Clarendon must believe that I shall take the first opportunity of renewing our acquaintance."

"Well, come to-morrow, then," said Dalton,

patting him on the shoulder ; and with that they parted.

“ Deny us to every one, Dejars,” said he to the groom of the chambers, as they crossed the gallery ; “ we wish to be alone, to-night,” and the man bowed in a manner that showed his master’s slightest wish was law with him.

It was a delightful night, that of Cecil’s first glimpse of Paris. The luxurious room in which the gay little party sat, with its draperies of blue and silver satin, its exquisite exotics, and priceless pictures,* and gems, and books, scattered about with the utmost profusion, all bespeaking the vast wealth and fastidious taste of its possessor ; the charming figure of the lively Camilla, as she bent in a graceful attitude over her harp, and warbled a sprightly *ariette* ; Dalton’s wife, so serene and lovely in her beauty, like some fair planet in a cloudless night of June ; and Dalton himself, usually so stern, and proud, and unbending, the gayest and wittiest of the whole ; altogether formed a *tout ensemble* such as he had seldom or never witnessed before.

“And it was this man who could linger contented for weeks in a wretched wayside inn, to tend a poor sick fellow like me, when such a home as this awaited him !” was the grateful thought of the young man, as he eyed it all.

CHAPTER VII.

NORMAN MACDONALD was one of those noble characters, at once strong in impulse, single hearted in principle, and daring in action, which seem to spring up like some rare and beautiful tree in the desert, in the very highways of the world, as a beacon to show men what God created man to be before the fall.

With a princely fortune, an ancient name, and a handsome person, he was the very antipodes of the creature whom Jasper Vernon would have selected as his tool, to work his ends by. Every thought, and word, and act, of such a being gave the lie to the plots by which the crafty relative of the Clarendons was to rise to power, and rank, and wealth; and none felt this more than Jasper Vernon, himself, as he rolled on

towards Jedburgh, in the crazy old chaise of which we have already made honourable mention.

Norman had lived to be twenty five, and had never yet experienced the mingled hopes, and pangs, and fears of love. True, many a scheming, wily mamma had angled for him with a skilfully disguised hook, under the hope that Norman Abbey, with all its ~~fair~~ wealth of wood and stream, would become, by connubial ties, the home of one of her own graceful yet worldly daughters; and though Norman flirted, and visited, and picnicked, and danced, and sang, with each and all, yet with none did he ever fall in love; and so Norman at last came to be looked upon as an unmarrying man, by all his acquaintances, though he was still occasionally persecuted by husband-hunting mammas and portionless sisters, but without effect.

Great, therefore, was the indignation that hovered over every fire-side within twenty miles of Lady Susan Clarendon's residence, when it was first whispered that Norman had actually proposed to Miss Clarendon, and within a week,

too, of the ill-fated ball. Stranger still was the news that accompanied this startling discovery, that none exactly could decide whether Eleanor Clarendon had actually accepted him or not. Bets were laid, with heavy odds, on the subject; mammas discussed the pros and cons, and misses marvelled and wondered with pretty bewilderment; and yet the great question of all still remained unsolved.

Lookers on, they say, can tell how the game goes better than those who play: and therefore, dear reader, come with us into Lady Susan's dressing-room, and peep over the stately old lady's shoulder, at the letter she is writing,—thank heaven, Lady Susan writes a truly aristocratic scrawl, with most legible pothooks, and therefore it is no difficult task to decipher every word.

Although it was past midnight, Lady Susan was still out of bed, with a shawl wrapped over her shoulders, in her night *deshabille*, which made her stern, determined features stand out in stronger relief than ever. She was sitting at her dressing-table, writing; two large wax candles

were placed, one on either side, in strange juxtaposition with rouge pots, wigs, cosmetics, and the countless paraphernalia of an old belle's toilet.

The letter was addressed to Jasper Vernon, and ran thus :—

“Norman has proposed ! so far your schemes have prospered. I say your schemes, Jasper Vernon, because I dare not link myself so far with you in the matter. A sinful old woman like me, with one foot in the grave, has enough to answer for to God, without daring to bring this great sin upon her head in her old age ! Do not, I beg of you, believe from this opening that I mean to betray you. No, Jasper Vernon ! the solemn promise I made you prevents my doing this. I will stand by you to the very last, as far as that vow goes ; but as I hate and abhor the hellish schemes you have hatched, and which I am doomed to bring to maturity, I will not go farther ; I will perform my bond, and no more !

“But I am wandering, and will return to Norman and Eleanor. A couple of days after the latter was convalescent, I contrived matters

so that our Lothario should be her companion in the walk we are in the habit of taking every evening, pleading a bad headache, which I really had, as my excuse for not joining them. Eleanor was still weak from her recent illness, and so Norman offered her his arm; I watched them from the window until they were out of sight, and then went into my own dressing-room to await their return.

“In a quarter of an hour, I heard Eleanor crossing the gallery, and anticipating what had occurred, went out to meet her. Jasper! I wish you had seen her at that moment; the sight, I feel, would for ever have turned you from your devilish schemes. Her beautiful black hair had escaped from beneath her bonnet, and streamed behind upon her shoulders, as she came swiftly towards me; her cheeks, that had been so pale before, were now flushed and feverish; her eyes sparkled with fire; a passionate determination, that became her beautiful face admirably, was stamped on every feature; her head was thrown partly back, so as to show the proud swelling of

her exquisitely modelled throat ; and her hands clutched convulsively the folds of her heavy mourning dress, in a manner that was enough of itself to show the storm that was raging within her breast.

“I was thunder-struck ! I was paralysed ! and when with the port and air of a tragic queen, Eleanor passed me with her Medea-like countenance, it seemed to freeze me to stone. The tears were in her eyes ; her cheek was wet with them, and as she passed, she darted one thrilling glance upon me, that spoke volumes of injured confidence and broken love.

“When you have read thus far, I expect you will throw down the letter, and declare me mad. Do so, if you choose ; I have only written a plain, unvarnished tale of facts, and, as God is my witness, have only told the truth. If you disbelieve me, come hither yourself, and see and judge for yourself. An hour afterwards, on hearing Eleanor still pacing her chamber, I ventured to knock ; no answer was returned, and not venturing to intrude upon her, I went away,

and returned just before I went to bed, at twelve o'clock. She was then asleep; but the tears lay undried upon her cheeks, and the same angry flush lay crimsoning beneath them.

“In the morning, I sent for Norman; but the groom brought back word that he had left home suddenly. Since then, I have received a hurried note from him, merely desiring to know how Miss Clarendon is, and apologising for not calling to make his adieux before he went. Eleanor has since then been wayward and fitful, her humour changing almost with every hour. At one moment she is merry and cheerful; at the next, silent and constrained. Everything seems forced; and yet until Norman returns, I dare not attempt to solve the mystery. Once only, when she was more than ordinarily moved, she confessed that something had passed between Norman and herself; and then, as if jealous even of divulging so little as that, she drew herself up, and assuming her Medea-like countenance, stood like a marble statue, in her indignant beauty, beside me. And the mischief of it all is, that she looks so superb

at such times, that I cannot do aught but gaze and gaze my soul away upon her, until I lose the very power of speaking.

“I cannot write more now; Eleanor’s sullen fit has lasted all day, but Norman returns to-morrow, and I shall then know all. Until then, adieu.

“Ever yours,

“SUSAN CLARENDON.”

CHAPTER VIII.

HERBERT ran on, turning now to the right, and now to the left, whenever a bye street, that promised concealment, presented itself, alive only to the hope of escaping from the ferocious gang he had fallen amongst, as long as his boyish strength permitted; until, at last, hungry, footsore, and completely exhausted, he gradually slackened his pace, until it subsided into a walk. Long ere this, the city, with its sights and sounds, had disappeared behind him; he had now gained the brow of a hill, and heated and breathless with running, and, yielding to his boyish terror, he crept behind a hedge to rest himself, and began to cry.

It was still very dark, although a red streak in the east gave promise of the dawn. With a

forethought beyond his years, he presently made up his mind to resume his journey at once, as he ran less chance of being retaken as long as the night continued, and murmuring the Lord's Prayer to himself as he stole out of his lair, he once more struck out upon the high road, and, with little sense of weariness or fatigue, continued his flight.

He had not walked above a mile, when a light, gleaming through the darkness, attracted his attention, and which, as he advanced, gradually brightened and increased, until a broad stream of light, accompanied by a roaring noise, flashed upon him, and he presently discovered the outline of a hut, something resembling the Fungus, standing a little aside from the road, and sheltered by a few lofty trees, which made the little hut seem still more picturesque.

He had by this time almost forgotten the terror that had haunted him in his flight, but it was not without a beating heart that he stole up to the door, which, standing wide open, enabled him to perceive that the sole occupant of the

forge was a brawny, athletic-looking fellow, whose manly figure, as he flitted to and fro before the boy's dazzled gaze, looked perfectly herculean in the glowing light in which he stood. His trousers were tucked up to the knees, displaying a pair of sinewy limbs which had their counterparts in the naked arms that wielded the huge shining bars on which he was at work; his broad brawny chest was laid bare to the fire, and was covered with black curling hair, almost as thick and matted as that upon his head; his sunburnt face was streaming with perspiration, and had yet a kindly expression about it, notwithstanding the dark, strongly-marked features, owing principally to the playful gleam of the dark eyes, that flashed from beneath the swart and shaggy brows;—the whole scene was so unexpected, and so like enchantment in that lonely place, that the boy stood and gazed for several minutes at it and its solitary actor, until the latter chancing to turn round, discovered Herbert standing, pale and trembling, in the narrow doorway of his workshop.

“Good heavens! what a fright thou’st given me!” ejaculated this good-natured giant, letting fall his metal bar as he started back a pace or two; “is’t alive, my little fellow, or not?” advancing a step to reconnoitre, and then reassured by his scrutiny, he took two or three huge strides towards the poor little fellow.

Herbert’s first impulse was to run away, but reassured by the sonorous, yet kindly tones with which the smith’s ejaculations were uttered, that he had nothing to fear, he, in his turn, came forward, and in a tremulous whisper, said, “I have lost my way, sir, if you please.”

“If I please, my little gentleman!” rejoined the smith, extending his hairy arms, and lifting the poor little fellow as if he had been a doll, on a level with his own streaming face, “ha! ha! ha! that’s a good’un now:” and his huge jaws distended with a loud laugh as his gigantic frame shook with suppressed mirth; “and how far, pray, may you have come, little’un?” he added kindly, as he took off Herbert’s cap, and patted him on the head; “those little legs of thine

don't seem very able to carry thee far, and yet thy trousers are all torn, and those bits of shoes worn into holes, I see;" examining, with laughable curiosity and wonder, Herbert's travel-worn and tattered habiliments.

"Oh, a long, long way, sir," said the boy, with a weary sigh; "if you please, I've been two days and nights away from home, but I won't go back, because they whip me;" and he began to cry bitterly.

"Heart alive! now don't cry, my little darling," said the man, sitting down carefully on a huge block of wood, and patting Herbert's cheeks gently with his huge brawny hands, throwing into his face at the same time a ludicrous expression of pity and astonishment. "If they whipped thee, thou shan't go back, my little hero, if Natty Gyde can help it; but if thou'st been on tramp all this time, I'll warrant that weasand of thine ain't over well stocked, eh?"

"If you please, sir, I don't understand," stammered Herbert.

"Thy belly," rejoined the giant, laconically.

"Oh! I'm dreadfully hungry," said the boy,

eagerly ; “ I’ve not eat anything for a long time, sir.”

“ Poor little fellow,” muttered the smith, pityingly, starting up with him in his arms again, and going to a rude closet, which, however, was better furnished than its outward appearance could have promised ; “ thou shalt fill it, then, my hearty, and then lie down in that corner and sleep off thy troubles.”

Then, drawing out a still ruder table, he quickly placed a loaf of blackish bread, a bottle of ale, and a huge pipkin, about half filled with some kind of stew, upon it, and drawing his seat towards it, filled a trencher with some of the hash, and motioned Herbert to commence. Herbert was far too hungry to be fastidious, and the mess, which was in reality very good, tasted quite delicious in his present famished state : his entertainer watched him clear the platter with right good will, and having poured him out a mug of ale, finished the bottle himself, and then set about making him a sort of rude couch in one corner, to lie down upon.

“If you please, will you shut the door?” said the boy, who had cast many an anxious glance at this object of his terrors during his meal.

“Shut the door, my little fellow?” echoed the smith, with a puzzled air.

“Yes, if you please, sir,” said the boy, artlessly.

“No, no, Natty Gyde never works with his door shut,” rejoined the other, in a gruff tone; and then looking into the boy’s fair open countenance, something in the wild terrified expression he descried there, made him change his tone, as he added, “~~now~~ tell me, my little’un, why you want the door shut?”

“Oh! I was only afraid those naughty men might be coming this way, sir,” said Herbert, reassured by his altered manner; “and the light of that place, sir, might bring them in, and then they would—Oh! I’m sure they would,—take me away from you again,” he cried, beginning to sob bitterly.

His evident terror and distress seemed to affect the good-natured giant, for after rubbing the back of his hard hand once or twice, hurriedly across

his eyes, he patted the boy caressingly on the head, and then closing the door, he threw a heavy oaken beam across it, and returned to his fire, saying, "There now, my little springald, it would take a regiment of dragoons to get in, if I didn't give them leave; and now lay thy ways down, and fall asleep on Natty's bed, and get a good sleep before morning, little'un."

Herbert looked at the couch, which rude and strange as it was, being principally formed of old clothes, and a couple of ragged blankets, with a heavy counterpane for a quilt, was yet by far the best he had occupied since leaving Jasper Vernon's, and being far too weary to take off any portion of his dress, laid down just as he was, and closed his eyes.

Many times before the morning, in his broken slumbers (for he was too tired to enjoy untroubled sleep), did he see, through his half-closed eyes, his gigantic protector flitting to and fro in his dusky smithy, the strokes of his huge hammer ringing in his ears, even in his sleep. At times, too, when half lulled in forgetfulness, he fancied

that a huge, indistinct form, hung over his rude couch, and he more than once imagined that he felt the touch of that rough, hard hand passed gently over his heated brow; this might, however, be only fancy, but whether it was so or not, it lulled him to sleep again, and he did not awake until the morning sun was streaming merrily into the hut, the floor of which, with the broken bits of metal, glittered like diamonds in the beams.

He had lain watching his new friend with dreamy interest, as he sat with one hand supporting his shaggy head, eyeing him keenly through the reeking volume of smoke that arose from a short blackened pipe, for some time, without thinking of rising, when a light step was heard on the road without, and the next minute a girl, a little younger than himself, tripped blithely into the hut, setting down an open basket on the floor, and then went straight up to the giant.

"Thou'st early this morning, Nan," said the latter, taking his pipe from his mouth, and lifting her up in his arms.

“Mother is away to the town, father, earlier than usual, and so I came off with your breakfast,” said the little lass, kissing him as she spoke, and then nestling her head on his brawny chest; presently, her quick glances, running round the blackened hut, discovered Herbert, sitting up on his pallet, and she turned an inquisitive look upon her father again, but without speaking.

“Company, Nan,” the latter answered, laconically, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe. “Come forward, master, and give my little lass a kiss, will you?” he added, good-naturedly.

Herbert blushed, but complied, with a smile, that made Nan exclaim, “Oh, what a pretty boy, father! and is he going to live with us? I’m sure I’ll like you,—but is he going to live with us?” she reiterated, turning to her father, who was watching with gruff complacency this little scene.

“Don’t know, lass,—musn’t ask questions,” he muttered, lifting up the basket.

“Oh, father, you must let me get it for you,” cried the little lass, snatching it from his hand, and bustling about with a laughable air of im-

portance; now pulling out the table from its nook, adjusting the coarse, clean towel, that did duty for a table-cloth, and setting three mugs upon it, which, flanked with the loaf already mentioned, and a smoking biggin of coffee, was the breakfast. "Mother always says I'm to be handy, and save you trouble, and so you must sit still, and look on, until we're quite ready."

She was a little round thing, almost as broad as she was long, with a neat, plump figure, oddly dressed, in a frock that had evidently been once a respectable bed-curtain, which, with its huge, staring patterns, gave her a grotesque, yet not unbecoming appearance. She had rosy, shining cheeks, dark hair, neatly braided over a fair forehead, a nice little nose, small, dimpling mouth, a merry twinkle in her dark eyes, and a fair skin, which really made one fancy, that when double her age, she would be as pretty a lass as ever you clapped eyes upon, or made your heart beat pit-a-pat against your ribs. At any rate, Herbert, as he watched her flitting to and fro before him,

thought her by far the prettiest little girl he had ever seen ; but then, anything neat and clean looked pretty in that black old den.

“ Will there be plenty, father, for all ? ” she whispered, stealing up to the smith, as soon as her arrangements were concluded ; “ because, if there should not, you know,—— ” and the rest of the sentence was inaudible.

“ Quite enough, Nan, for all,” he muttered, giving her another kiss, as he patted her rosy cheeks ; “ but thou’rt a good girl, nevertheless, for wishing to deprive thyself of a meal for the youngster ; go to the cupboard, lass, and bring the stew out as well.”

Nan bustled up to the cupboard, and climbing up on a log of wood, brought down the brown pipkin, which she presently placed on the table, exclaiming, as she peered into it, “ Why, father, it’s not half finished yet ! ”

“ To be sure, lass ; and yet, the youngster, there, and I, made a hearty supper of it, for all that,” rejoined the smith, smiling at her look of astonishment ; “ but it will eke out the breakfast

nicely,—holloa, there, my little fellow, are you ready?”

“Breakfast is ready, if you please,” said Nan, dropping a curtsey, as she turned to Herbert, which made him think her ten times prettier than before.

“And I’m sure I’m quite ready for it,” rejoined the boy, smiling, as he took his seat beside Nan, who blushed and smiled in her turn.

“Help him first, father,” said the little girl, as she placed a slice of bread beside her new companion; “you know I can wait.”

“You are far too self-denying, my lass,” said the buclly smith, good-naturedly, as he handed Herbert his mug. “Now fall to, my little fellow,” turning to the boy, “and make a hearty meal, will you; od’s, how it goes to my heart to see you looking so starved, and it’s not what you’ve been used to, or my eyes belie me sadly.”

“Were you always poor?” demanded Nan, eagerly; “you have such a pretty, soft skin, and white hands, that I think you can’t always have

been used to tramping about the country in this way."

"Oh no; my papa was a rich man, and kept a great many servants," said Herbert, as the tears brimmed up to his eyes.

"A rich man!" ejaculated his entertainer, letting fall his knife and fork; "with houses, and land, and money?"

"Yes, he had all these, and kept hunters and hounds, and always had a houseful of company—oh, such gaily dressed people used to visit us!" continued the boy, eagerly; "and Cecil and I had ponies a-piece to ride on, and a yacht as well."

"What is that?" demanded Nan, as her large dark eyes distended with wonder, at the narration of all this grandeur, which, until this moment, she had never dreamed the whole world contained; "is it something to eat?"

Herbert burst into a loud laugh, but instantly checked himself, and said, "A yacht is a pleasure-boat."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nan, pursing up her little

mouth at this explanation ; “ and where did you sail with it ? ”

“ Oh, we had a lake in the park,” said the boy, who could talk for ever about his home, when he found ready listeners, as at present ; “ and Cecil and I used to sail up and down the lake, under the shadow of the trees, amongst the swans, all day long, at times ; and Cecil used to play on the flute, and Nell sang to it.”

“ Oh, how pretty ! ” cried Nan, clapping her hands with delight, as her round, rosy face crumpled into smiles, as she listened to the boy’s narrative ; “ and why, pray, did you leave the pretty lake, and the trees, and swans ? ” she asked, with a curious look.

The boy burst into tears, but did not speak.

“ Have I hurt you ? ” cried Nan, running up to him, and laying a little chubby hand on his shoulder.

The smith had all this while been watching and listening to the pair, being more intent on what was passing before him than attentive to his breakfast, which was rapidly growing cold. The

boy's passionate burst of tears, however, aroused him, and he cried, in a gruff tone, "Be done, Nan, and come to thy seat again, lass. Can't you let the poor little fellow alone, you hussey?"

A cloud darkened the little round face for a moment, but it was over almost before it could have had time to settle on it, and Nan presently busied herself with her breakfast, her father following her example in silence, and neither troubling Herbert with any more questions. In a few minutes, he, too, dried his tears, and began to eat again with more composure, a heavy sob from time to time escaping his weary heart.

By the time the meal was concluded, both the smith and Nan had recovered their tongues, but the latter still regarded Herbert with some reserve, which she evidently made no effort to conquer, as she several times rejected his offers of assistance in stowing away the remains of the repast and tidying up the hut, her father sitting by and watching her movements in silence.

"Now, I'm quite ready," she cried, standing with her sturdy little arms stuck a-kimbo, like

a buxom old woman, as soon as she had finished ;
“ shall I run on, father, and get everything nice at home, before you come?” tying a tatterdemallion old bonnet on, as she spoke.

“ No, thou can go with us, lass,” rejoined the smith, good-humouredly, patting her on the head ;
“ unless the youngster here should be ashamed to walk with thee.”

“ Oh no,” cried Herbert, extending his hand.

“ Oh, I can easily walk by myself!” retorted Nan, pushing it back, with a scornful frown.

“ Take his hand, Nan,” cried the smith, gruffly.

“ But, father ——.”

“ Silence,” growled the man, as a sudden change of the expression of his countenance made the strong dark features absolutely terrific for a moment. “ Be a good lass, now, and take the youngker’s hand,” he added more gently, as Herbert stood trembling before him.

Nan pouted and frowned, but did not venture to disobey, and the smith, closing the shutter, locked the door and followed the boy and girl with his usual enormous strides, which quickly

brought him up to them. Nan then looked back and reassured by the playful gleam she detected in her father's eyes, dropped Herbert's hand, and took his instead.

"Here, my little fellow," said the smith, extending a brawny fist; "if my little lass won't have thee, I will," and clasping Herbert's delicate hand in his, with a rough tenderness that many a gentler being might have imitated, the trio went on at a rapid pace, Nan jumping and singing, and laughing merrily at every step, whilst poor Herbert, who had become weary and dispirited once more, trudged on in silence by his side.

"There's our house!" cried Nan, in an exulting tone, as a turn in the road brought one of the most beautiful scenes in the world before their eyes. "Look, father, there's the ducks in the mill-race, and the clucking hen, with all her chickens about her," and with a loud scream of joy she sprang forward to salute her favourites.

The smith paused for a moment, still holding Herbert by the hand, as his quick eye took in at a glance every well-known point of the landscape,

with which he had been familiar from boyhood—the rippling stream, gleaming in the morning sun, the black old mill-wheel, and the mill itself, garlanded with ivy and roses; the meadows stretching far and wide on every side, with the haymakers at work amongst them; the sharp blue outlines of the distant hill; the short, round figure of Nan, as she stood amongst her feathered pets; and then with a contented sigh he squeezed Herbert's hand, unconsciously in his own, and in another moment was sitting in his own easy chair, with a woman's arms,—the very counterpart of Nan, except that she was some thirty years older,—round his neck.

CHAPTER IX.

“AND that’s a little lad, Sall, that Providence seems, for the nonce, to have thrown in our way,” said Natty Gyde, pointing to Herbert, after submitting quietly to his wife’s embraces; “he’s a pretty little fellow enough, and will make a nice companion for Nan, my lass.”

Mrs. Gyde, who was just as plump and rosy and cheery-looking as Nan, turned round at this speech, and surveyed Herbert with evident interest, for several moments, without speaking.

“He’s a stray sheep, Sall, that I’ve picked up, drifting about the country,” said the brawny giant, taking Nan upon his knee; “and thou must be a mother to the poor little fellow, for the present, lass.”

“That I will, and welcome,” rejoined his wife, cheerfully, as she drew Herbert towards her, and took his cap off; “what beautiful hair he has! and those clothes, Nat, dirty and ragged as they are, have cost a sight of money, some time or other.”

“He’s evidently some rich man’s child,” said Gyde, in a low tone; “but rich or poor, he’s always welcome to a bit and sup as long as ever Natty Gyde can earn them: he’s been talking up at the forge, about a grand park, and a lake, and a fine house, that he used to live in, and then he began to cry bitterly, and I didn’t ask farther.”

“Poor little fellow,” sighed the kind-hearted creature, and a tear rolled down her chubby cheek, as she took off Herbert’s sorry shoes, and replaced them by a pair of Nan’s, which were quite big enough for him, notwithstanding his being the senior. “But what will mother say, Nat?”

“I won’t allow her to say anything, Sall,” said the smith, in a determined tone; “this is my house, my lass, isn’t it?”

“Certainly!”

“ And though she is my mother, Sall, yet, poor thing, she’s quite in her dotage, and scarcely knows right from wrong, and a mere child might know it was only right, and one’s duty, as well, to take care of the poor little fellow, until one can return him to those he belongs to,” said the smith earnestly.

“ I won’t go back to them—naughty Jasper Vernon shan’t torment me again,” cried Herbert, passionately ; “ I ran away from him.”

“ Jasper Vernon,” muttered the smith, as if trying to fix the name in his memory ; “ do they call thee Vernon, my little fellow ? ” he demanded in a gentle tone.

“ No ! Jasper Vernon is a naughty man, and beat me,” cried Herbert, with a passionate burst of tears.

“ No, they can’t call him Vernon,” said Sall, eagerly ; “ did you hear what he said about the man’s beating him ? ”

Nan at this moment sprang from her father’s lap, and flung her round chubby arms about Herbert’s neck, putting up her pouting lips to be

kissed, as he stood in the centre of the floor, crying bitterly.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry; they sha’n’t beat you any more,” she whispered, nestling close to him as she spoke—“Father won’t let them.”

The smith and Sall stood eyeing this touching scene with moistened eyes, when a heavy step was heard descending the stairs, and presently a woman, whose tall figure was bent double with age, appeared amongst them.

“Good morning, mother,” said Nat, rising and approaching her; “how are your pains this morning?”

“Good morning, son,” was the stern reply; “I am better;” and her keen, hawk-like eyes were fixed upon Nan and Herbert, as she supported herself upon the stout oak staff she carried in her hand.

She did not resemble, in one single feature, the good-natured giant who had given her this appellation of reverence, and still less did the expression of her countenance match with the good humour that was such a distinguishing trait

in the visage of Natty Gyde. She must have been very tall when in her prime, for her figure, bent double as it was with time, quite overtopped that of her buxom daughter-in-law; her hair was completely white, and gathered in a roll over her wrinkled and lofty forehead, while two small black eyes gave a disagreeable expression to features you might easily believe to have been once very beautiful; and although her son's cottage was poor and meanly furnished, yet her air, and the faded dress of brocaded silk, made you readily imagine that, at some earlier time, she had moved in a much higher sphere than that in which she now found herself.

“Where did you pick up that boy?” she demanded, turning to her son, after a long pause.

“Where I pick up a great many other things, mother,” said Natty, good-humouredly; “at the forge.”

“At the forge! and so you intend, I fancy, to add another brat to your already sufficiently scanty means, son, eh?” she demanded, with covert sarcasm.

“ If God wills it, mother,” said the smith, with great composure.

“ Faugh! who taught thee that canting whine, son?” she cried, striking her staff angrily on the ground.

“ No one, mother : it is my maxim, you know, to do as I’d wish to be done by,” returned her son, good-humouredly ; “ and if Providence throws this poor little fellow in my way, I’d think myself worse than a brute to turn him adrift.”

“ A beggar’s brat!” muttered the old woman, as she seated herself in her high-backed chair, and eyed Herbert with a scornful frown.

“ Nay mother, that for certain he isn’t,” cried Sall, eagerly ; “ did you ever see a beggar’s brat with such a face ? and look at this shirt, why it’s as fine and white as a muslin handkerchief.”

“ More reason for you to have nothing to do with him!” returned the old woman, folding her thin bony hands on her lap. “ There ’ll be a hue and cry raised for him as soon as he’s missed ; and then you’ll get into trouble, and get blamed for

enticing him away from home; but I know it is no use, son, to argue with you, and so I've done; the consequences must rest on your own head."

"I can't turn the poor little fellow adrift," said the smith, firmly; "and really he is so engaging and pretty, that I feel drawn to him already; just look, how Nan and he have got to love each other already!"

The old woman took a pinch of snuff. "If you take my advice, son, you will instantly set off to the town, and make inquiries about him; and, who knows, but that you may drop in for something handsome for your trouble, as well!"

The smith uttered an indignant oath at this, and strode out of the little room, patting Herbert and Nan on the head as he passed them, while his buxom little wife, who seemed to share in his indignation, shortly afterwards left the room as well; there was then no one left but Herbert and his little companion, and the old woman, who sate bolt upright in her chair, watching the pair with all the sleepless vigilance of a cat lying in wait for some luckless mouse.

Herbert, whose faculties had been wonderfully sharpened by the adventures he had already gone through, had, whilst playing with Nan, lent an attentive ear to all that passed between the old woman and Gyde, during their interview. The suggestion she had thrown out as to the reward that might be in store for them, filled him with the greatest alarm; and, although his protector's return, soon after, somewhat allayed his terror, yet it had fixed itself so firmly upon his mind, that every sudden noise without made him tremble with apprehension, lest the dreaded form of Jasper Vernon, or the man Rudd, should appear, to carry him back to the doom from which he had just escaped.

This bugbear of his imagination terrified him so much, that he determined to make his escape as soon as the darkness should once more favour his flight; and he counted the hours, as they dragged their slow length along, with a sickening anxiety that completely destroyed his appetite, and made the motherly Sall really alarmed for his health.

At length, it grew dusk; and Gyde, who had slept during most of the day, departed to the forge once more; and shortly afterwards, Sall, having given the two children a homely supper, undressed both, and put them to bed, in two closet-beds that stood in opposite corners of the kitchen.

Herbert had no intention of sleeping, although he was very drowsy, for his mind had been incessantly occupied all through the day with his plan of escape, and so he lay on his homely pallet, watching the old woman and Sall, as they sate in the firelight, each on her own side of the chimney; the former, in her old attitude, appearing, to his boyish imagination, like some terrible ogress, whilst Sall knitted away in silence, occasionally casting a hurried glance over to the two pallets, as if to assure herself that the children were both sleeping soundly.

Whether it was that he miscalculated his own powers, or that the silence of the place had a soothing effect upon his senses, certain it is, that he had not gazed long on the scene before him, before he fell sound asleep; how long he had

slept he did not know, for, when he awoke, the fire had burnt low in the grate, and yet there was light enough to discern the threatening figure of the old woman, as she sate bolt upright in her chair, with her head thrust forward, apparently in eager conversation with some one who now occupied her daughter-in-law's chair. Sall, it however was not, for the figure was taller, and darker, and larger altogether; and as Herbert listened, he caught the deep, hoarse voice of a man, muttering a reply.

There was something in the dubious twilight that filled the room, and which threw the shadows of the old woman and her midnight visitor out in such bold relief, very terrible to the senses of this young boy; and yet, with a courage beyond his years, he neither stirred nor uttered a cry, but lay in breathless terror, endeavouring to catch a sentence, here and there, of the conversation, to enable him to discover who this midnight visitor could be, and what was the errand that led him to confer with such an accomplice at that late hour.

For a long time, however, they conversed in such a cautious whisper, that he was utterly unable to catch a single word of what was passing; but by degrees, as the pair became excited, they gradually forgot their caution.

“Will Gyde be here soon, mother?” demanded the man, after a pause, in a tone of voice that made the perspiration burst out of every pore of the boy’s trembling frame.

“No, no, Jacob; you needn’t fear him!” said the old woman, with a malignant smile; “he’s safe enough, I warrant me, till morning, at earliest!”

“What an ass it is, to toil and sweat as he does for such a sorry pittance,” muttered the man, musingly; “and with never a penny to bless himself with! whilst I, who never did a hand’s turn in my life, have many a jolly carouse at other people’s expense!”

“Ah! Jacob, you’re a lucky dog!” mumbled the old woman, with a shrill laugh; “but poor Gyde—the senseless fool—toils, and works his very fingers to the bone, to get Sall and the brat a crust of bread.”

“Mother,” muttered the man, after another pause, “what makes you like a base-born brat like me—that was spurned and spit upon, from my very birth, as a thing of nought, and that am a living memorial of thy shame—so well, when I can see you hate Nat, who, with all his faults, had an honest man for his father,—and your husband,—so bitterly?”

“Ah, Jacob! Jacob! thy father was a pretty man, and a gentleman born, and as free and generous with his money as a prince!” mumbled the old woman, as she cowered over the fire. “He was a gentleman, Jacob, and Gyde’s father was but a smith, Jacob, dearie!”

“But he was thy husband, thou old beldam!” muttered the man, fiercely; “and an honest man too, though he ended his days on the gallows!”

“Ah, dear! dear! and he met his deserts too, lovey, for killing such a pretty man as thy father; oh, he was a generous gentleman, was Cecil Dalton, as they called him, lovey,” whimpered the old hag, in a shrill keen voice.

“Hush! thou old fool, or Sall will be hearing

thee," growled the man, as he placed another log on the smouldering fire. "And sarved him right, say I, though he was whât he was to me."

"But tell me all about what thou's been doing, lovey, since I saw thee, Jacob, last," mumbled the old woman, as she rocked herself to and fro, crooning and mouthing to herself as she did so, so rapidly, that the boy, as he lay and watched her, imagined he saw one of the witches of his nursery terrors before him. "Thou's always getting into harn's way, dearie, to frighten the poor old 'ooman out of her wits for thee."

The fire at that moment burst into flame, and the boy, with a sickening despair, beheld before him the haggard and savage visage of Jacob Rudd. Jacob Rudd it indeed was, with a frightful gash running down one cheek, laying it bare almost to the jaw, looking ten times more wild and ferocious than he had ever beheld him before; with his tattered garments clotted and stained with mud and blood, betokening the dangerous encounter and hair-breadth escape he had had from the fangs of justice.

“ Nothing but the old tale, mother,” he said, at last, with sullen ferocity. “ We were hard at work, as usual, all except Spike, who pretended to be off on an errand of his own, when the polis’ came down upon us, and after a short and bloody encounter, carried us all off to the stone-jug. Spike had ’peached, as I suspected, and a dear reckoning we shall have when we meet next.”

“ And the escape, Jacob, the escape?” mumbled the old woman, eagerly, as she leant over towards him with every sharp keen feature thrown out into strong relief against the firelight.

“ Was easily enough managed, mother,” rejoined the ruffian, with an exulting laugh. “ They put me, heavily ironed, into a den by myself, that had a little blink with rotten bars to it—ha! ha! how easily they snapped when I gave one good wrench; and they had forgotten to search me, so that I soon struck off the irons; I had a dirty bath, though, for the cell looked into a stagnant ditch, and when I came up again, after my plunge—faugh, I had nearly swallowed half a score dead

puppies and kittens for a water-bite ; but here I am again, mother, to say good-bye before I go off on tramp again."

" Ah ! dearie, dearie, you'll never rest till you come to the gallows ! " whined the old woman, as she wrung her withered hands bitterly together at the end of the narrative. " And what ken are you going upon now, lovey ? "

" To Paris, thou old fool ! "

" Paris, honey ! " she echoed in a bewildered tone ; " where is that, lovey ? "

" A long way off, over the water, " he rejoined, moodily.

" Ah ! I see, I see, " she muttered, shaking her head and muttering the word over many times to herself, with a discordant laugh ; " where they sent poor Bet to, dearie. "

" Faugh, no ; Paris is the merriest, gayest place, mother, under the sun, " he rejoined with a loud laugh.

" And what ist'r going to do there, lovey ? " she inquired, eagerly. " What is my dashing jail-bird going to do in Paris, with that wild-look-

ing face, and all that pretty finery," she cried, with a jeering laugh. "Is it for a gentleman he's going to be amongst all the gay, rich folks he talks about, dearie!"

"No; thou old fiend, it isn't," he retorted, with a sudden blaze of his dark eyes, as the black veins rose up like whipcord on his brows. "I'm going to wipe out a long and fearful reckoning, thou old fool, and had it not been that a little brat I meant to take with me on the trip has given me the slip, I should have been on the salt water by this." .

"A brat!" echoed the old hag, glancing furtively at the pallet on which Herbert lay, and through the folding door of which he was listening to the narrative of the pair. "A brat, dearie?"

"Yes, mother, a brat," growled Rudd, following the direction of her glances with an eager look. "Hast thou seen aught of the kind?"

"With a pretty rosy face, and a blue eye," mumbled the old woman, with a sudden exulting laugh. "And had he nut-brown hair, dearie,

that fell in such pretty curls, and a voice—ah, dear, just such a voice as thou had, Jacob?”

“Hold thy old drivelling tongue, idiot,” growled the man, with a fearful oath, as he started up; “brat, or no brat, we’ll unearth him in a jiffey.”

Herbert uttered a shrill, heart-rending cry as the villain dragged him from the bed, and at the same moment, Sall, with streaming hair, and a face blanched to the colour of the night-dress she wore, rushed screaming into the room.

CHAPTER X.

HERBERT's first impulse was to fly for protection to Sall, who, with a face perfectly white from terror, leaned for support against the rude dresser, in front of which the ruffian named Rudd was standing. The determined grasp of the latter, however, defied all his efforts, and, with a convulsive sob, he sank down at the feet of his merciless captor, and cast a look of such mingled agony and entreaty at his late protector, that it thrilled her to the very heart.

“Come, come, my little cock-sparrow, thou must e'en trudge, and that right cheerfully, too, or thou and I will differ,” quoth the brutal giant, shaking him roughly. “I've had a pretty dance, seeking thee up and down the country; and budge is the word, my little gallows-bird.”

“Oh, Rudd! thou surely would not force such a poor little thing as that away with thee,” urged Sall, in a whisper. “Look how young and tender he is, Rudd.”

“Silence, daughter!” interposed the deep hoarse tones of the old woman’s voice; “there’s enow of mouths in this poor place to eat the sorry pittance Gyde earns, without such a beggar-brat as that making bread scarcer.”

Sall stood in great awe of her stern old mother-in-law; but she still ventured to plead for Herbert, who, with all the despairing terror of his tender years, lay almost in a swoon at the feet of the villain Rudd. The latter heard all. Gyde’s wife had to urge with a ferocious smile, which seemed, indeed, the natural expression of his countenance; and then uttering a deep oath, slouched his hat over his brows, and lifting Herbert upon his shoulders, strode out into the dark and stormy night.

“I will save him,” thought Sall, stealing gently after them, as the tears streamed down her honest cheeks; and heedless of the rain and wind, she

ran rapidly on towards the forge, scarcely conscious, in her progress, of the warfare of the elements, so entirely was her mind engrossed with the business she had in hand.

“Heart alive, wife, what’s the matter now!” ejaculated honest Natty, as she rushed, breathless, drenched, and pallid as a corpse, into his presence; “surely, nothing has chanced to t’ould woman or Nan? But thou’s as wet as wet, heart alive!” running his hand over her streaming garments with a laughable air of bewilderment, that sate most strangely on his burly visage.

“Oh, Natty—the boy!” sobbed Sall, catching in her breath, and bursting into tears anew, which the race and the wind had for the time put a stop to.

“And what about the boy, Sall?” inquired the smith, resting on his bellows, as he surveyed his plump little wife by the ruddy fire, that fairly illuminated the smithy: “he’s quite well, Sall—eh?”

“Oh, Gyde, what can we do!” murmured Sall, who seemed bewildered with grief; “the boy, Gyde!”

The answer our burly giant made to this appeal

might seem a strange one, and yet it brought Sall to her senses more speedily than anything else could have done. With a look in which wonder and alarm were strangely mixed, he left his favourite resting-place, and putting one arm round the plump little woman's waist, almost lifted her upon his knee as he said—

“Now, wife, tell me what has distressed thee about the lad; he isn't dead, I hope?”

“Oh, Natty, I wish he was!” sobbed the little woman, shading back the wet black hair from her face; “that villain Rudd ——”

“Curse the wretch!” growled the smith, as his eyes flashed fire; “he hasn't turned up again, has he, Sall?”

“Yes, yes, he has; and what is worse, Natty, he has taken the poor boy with him. I prayed and prayed that he would leave him, but the villain wouldn't; and oh, Natty, my heart died within me at the look the poor child gave me, as Rudd carried him out—I'll never forget it!” And throwing herself into his arms, she fairly sobbed out her sorrow on his rugged breast.

The massive yet good-humoured countenance of Gyde seemed to undergo a complete metamorphosis, as he listened to his wife's short and artless story. Although it had nothing in its lineaments that could be called handsome, it won your regard by the air of perfect good humour and frankness that characterised it. Now, however, the flashing eyes, and flushed cheeks, that glowed through all their swarthy hues; the grisly hair, that fell in wild clusters over the neck; and the veins, that swelled up like twisted snakes upon the broad, dark forehead—made him look to the full as terrible, in his new mood, as did all his long career of guilt and violence that of his reprobate kinsman, Rudd: in fact, a stranger might now have detected a striking likeness between them, although at ordinary times this was scarcely discernible.

“Dar'st thee go back again by thyself, Sall, my lass?” demanded the smith, after a long pause.

Sall shuddered, but answered “Yes,” with a bold heart.

“Then do so, and wait quietly in bed until I

bring thee news of the lad," said the smith, as he proceeded to divest himself of his leathern apron and jerkin. "I'll be back almost before thou, Sall; but thou must go to bed as soon as thou does get home, and if I don't come back just yet a bit, why, don't be uneasy, for no harm shall happen to me."

"And if thou can save the poor thing—•" began Sall.

"Depend upon it I will," rejoined the smith, boldly. "I am more than a match for Rudd," he added, extending a herculean arm; "and if we only encounter each other, I have little fear but that I will bring the poor little fellow safely back to thee again. Come, come, I'll lend thee my old coat, to wrap about thee, or thou wilt get thy death of cold, wife." And with a good-humoured chuckle, he enveloped the little woman in his great, coarse over-all, and thus defended, Sall set forward on her return.

When she got home again, she found that the old woman had already retired to rest; and disregarding her husband's injunctions, she raked the

embers of the fire together, and having thrown on a further supply of fuel, furnished the table with a homely supper, whilst a mug of beer was placed in a pipkin, within the fender, to simmer until his return.

Many times within the next hour did she steal to the door, to listen; but no footstep was audible without; and at last, convinced that her anxiety only made the time seem longer, she set about some household work, with which she was busily engaged when Natty burst into the house.

“He must have flown away, Sall,” was his first exclamation, as he threw his wet over-all and cap into a corner; “I inquired at every gate I came to, but nobody had seen or heard tell of such a pair; and here I am, weary, and footsore, and hungry to boot. God help the poor little fellow, for he has got a rough task-master now!”

Herbert and his companion, in the meanwhile, were several miles distant from the house of the honest smith. Dispirited and wretched, the poor lad was totally incapable of walking; and yet it was not without many a muttered curse, which

happily ended there, that this savage jailor found himself compelled to take him on his back once more, and carry him with him in his rapid flight.

Herbert, exhausted with fatigue and grief, soon fell asleep, despite the jolts of his uneasy pillow, and remained in this state for an hour or more, by which time Rudd had placed all pursuit far behind him. Something, after a time, aroused the boy, and when he looked up again, he discovered that he was once more under the shelter of a house, that he was lying on a rude sort of couch, and that a woman, with a black guttering candle in her hand, was standing over him in his sleep.

He saw her through his half-opened eyes, before she knew that he was awake; and had time enough to scan her wild, dark features before she in turn discovered that he was doing so. This woman was in every respect the very opposite of buxom Sall — tall, haggard, swarth, and malevolent, with black, shining hair, that hung in snake-like folds down a forehead almost as dark as the hair itself. There was something very

terrible, too, in the cold glitter of her small, black eyes, that made the boy's very blood curdle in his veins for fear.

He opened his eyes, but she did not speak, although she still seemed to watch him. But in reality, she was listening to a conversation that was passing between Rudd and another man, who sat at a table near the fire, eating their supper by its feeble light.

"And so you're bound for furrin parts, comrade," said the other man, in a low tone, as he helped himself to a portion of the savoury mess from a black stew-kettle, that stood upon the hob.

"Yes—to Paris," rejoined Rudd, gruffly.

"Aye, aye, I've been there," returned the other, carelessly.

"Have you!" exclaimed Rudd, eyeing him curiously; "and if I may be so bold, how long is it since?"

"Since I came back, do you mean?"

Rudd nodded.

"Only a week, or not so much. I had a quarrel with the police, and found the place

rather too hot for me ; and yet, if it hadn't been for a cursed Englishman, I might have kept my own against the best of them."

"An Englishman, indeed!" said Rudd, in a musing voice.

"Aye, an Englishman."

"Might I ask his name?" demanded Rudd, who eat like a famished wolf.

"Dalton—Edward Dalton is the fellow's name."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Chaussée d'Antin, No. 7."

The jail-breaker clasped his hands, and muttered something which neither his companion nor the woman could catch. Presently he got up, and said he was tired with tramping, and would like to go to bed ; and the woman, lighting a candle, motioned him to a ladder, which led apparently into a sleeping-loft, overhead. Nodding a surly acquiescence, he darted a look at the boy as he passed, which was answered by a significant nod from the woman, and clambering up the frail communication, he was presently heard clattering over the rickety flooring overhead.

A moment afterwards the noise had ceased, and they fancied he had thrown himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed. He had not done so however, for the occupant of an adjoining bed had attracted his attention. The loft only held this one and his own, and in this sleeper, Rudd recognised the man who had betrayed his gang to the police in the night of the capture, and his companion in guilt, Spike.

A glare of satisfied revenge shot across his face for a moment, as carefully shading the candle with his hand, he stood for more than a minute gazing wildly upon the pale, jaded face before him, lying so unconsciously and so securely under the very hand that longed to embrue itself in the sleeper's life's blood; and then, as if a different train of thought had usurped the place of these evil passions, Rudd stole noiselessly away, drew off his heavy, hob-nailed shoes, extinguished the light, and then threw himself, dressed as he was, upon his sorry pallet, and was soon buried in forgetfulness.

He was up and sitting in the chimney-nook

at his breakfast, when Herbert opened his weary eyes to the misery everything around him suggested to his mind. With a surly growl, Rudd ordered him to look sharp and dress himself, for they must be on the road betimes, and there was a rod for laggards, a weapon which Herbert knew from fatal experience carried a sting with it as well.

The man with whom Rudd had had the conversation over-night, at this moment came in from an inner room, and sat down beside him.

"You are an early bird, friend," he said with a smile, watching Rudd as he devoured the breakfast the woman had placed before him. "Do you always take to the roads by sunrise?"

"Always in warm weather, friend," rejoined Rudd, speaking with his mouth full, "the boy I have with me is only a poor traveller at the best, and we only get on but slowly on that account, and that makes me like an early start."

The man glanced curiously at Herbert, who sat pale and shivering, attempting in vain to swallow the mess placed before him, and yet

not daring to refuse it outright, for fear of a thrashing from Rudd.

“Your son?” he inquired, with a significant glance, that seemed to give the lie to itself.

Rudd caught the look and answered “No!” and then immediately added, “he belongs to a pal of mine, that went over the water a short time ago. Sorry am I that ever my good nature was burdened with such a drag.”

“Poor fellow! he only looks delicate,” said the other, gently, “thy poor feet, my little man, seem all chafed with the clumsy shoes thou’s wearing.”

The tear swelled up to Herbert’s eye, but it was frozen down again by the stern glance of Rudd, as his hoarse voice broke in upon the stranger’s sympathy, by calling him a little useless devil, that had only been brought into the world to plague honest folks, or he wouldn’t be hampered with him; and then jumping up, he threw down some money in payment of their lodging and breakfast, and with a surly good morning to his late companion, ordered the boy to follow him, and strode out of the house.

The man smiled as the robber and Herbert left the house, and after a moment's thought, followed them to the door. Rudd and his trembling companion were already fifty yards from the house, but the former turned round on hearing the other halloo to him to stop.

"Company's always the shortest cut, friend," said he, with the smile that seemed habitual to him, "and as our roads lie together for a time, why I think we may as well keep together as long as we can—come, what say you, comrade?"

"How do you travel, friend?" demanded Rudd, after considering a moment.

"How do I travel!" echoed the other; "why, a-foot, to be sure."

"I need not have asked, had I thought there was a doubt of that," said Rudd, with a sneer. "Can you stand a long tramp, and a quick? can you bear hunger and thirst, and lie down at night in an empty barn, with a hungry belly? do you bear the summer's heat and the winter's cold, without a murmur? If you can, why come on, and I'll cry you welcome."

“Try me,” said the other, seriously, “and then judge for yourself. As for the eating and drinking, I never fast when I can get a bellyful by fair means or foul; and for the rest, these bones of mine have had far too many a hard knock to care when, how, or where they lie down to rest themselves.”

“Then come on,” said Rudd, holding out his hand; “I like your look—why or wherefore I cannot tell. What is your name, friend?”

“Call me Hemp. It’s an expressive one enough; but I had another once,” said his new companion, with a bitter laugh. “What is your own?”

“Jacob Rudd.”

“And the boy’s?”

“What do they call you, young un?” demanded Rudd.

“Herbert,” whispered the boy.

“Herbert! why that’s a gentleman’s name,” rejoined the other, suspiciously; “do you know who your father was, my little fellow?”

“Tush!” muttered Rudd, pushing Herbert

away from him, as he spoke, to the other side of the road, as he whispered something in the man's ear, and wound up the communication by a hoarse laugh.

"Poor little wretch," muttered the other, eyeing the boy with a look of pity, and then, sinking his voice, he said in a low tone, "and so he fancies his father was a gentleman, eh?"

Rudd nodded, as he said in a significant tone, "the poor fellow was hung in reality, as many a better man has been since his time; however, the boy is a lively little fellow, and worth his meat, such as it is. I suppose you have no notion of going back to Paris, just yet," he inquired, in an eager tone.

"Why I don't know that. Fouché has his police trained so precious sharp that their hawk-eyes can pierce through almost any disguise. If you would make it worth my while, perhaps"—

"I cannot do it myself, but a worthy gentleman who lives hercaway perhaps might," said Rudd, after a pause. "Did you ever hear of one Jasper Vernon?"

“The canting hypocrite that lives at Mount Ephraim — isn’t that the name he gives his house?”

“I believe so; but, hypocrite or not, this Vernon I must see before I turn my back upon old England. Money makes him as great a villain as the sweet passion of revenge has made me. Ha! ha! you see what fine language I use; but I had a gentleman for my— forbear. We have had a little business together before now; but this job I have now on hand will crown all, and he shall pay like a prince for it, and fee you as well. Come, is it a bargain?”

“Agreed!” cried his new ally, grasping his hand. “We can’t get to this Mount Ephraim, as the old sinner calls it, before night, can we?”

“No; it’s a long tramp,” rejoined Rudd, moodily, “and the boy, too, is footsore; however perhaps it is as well, after all, for the likes of us will scarcely be thought an ornament to a gentleman’s library by daylight. Can you speak French, comrade?”

“Famously. You could scarcely tell me from a Frenchman,” returned the other, with a gay laugh. “Shall I give you a specimen?”

“No, no; keep that for the present, or give Mr. Vernon a specimen, to-night. And about the disguises—”

“What disguises?”

“When we go over the water, you know.”

“Oh leave me to manage that; I know a trick that will cheat the very devil himself, friend. I could transform you so that your own mother would not know you.”

“He has changed me so that few would,” muttered the other, under his breath; and then noticing that Herbert scarcely kept up with him, he dealt him a blow with his knotted ashen stick that made the poor little fellow writhe and cringe beneath it, although no cry issued from his lips.

“I tell you what, friend,” cried his new associate, snatching the stick from his hands, and breaking it upon his knee, “such work as that I cannot stomach at all. If you and I have to

travel in company, the boy shall have fair play, or we cry quits."

"He is such an idle varlet," growled Rudd, surlily. "Just look now how he shams to be footsore."

"And well he may, for every step he takes leaves a bloody print behind it," retorted the other, angrily. "It's fair murder, friend, to use the poor child in that way. Do you feel those little trotters of yours to pain you, sirrah?"

"Come, come; don't teach the boy to fancy himself ill-used, Hemp," growled Rudd. "The next stream we come to he can wash those useless feet of his, and we'll have a rest soon. There should be a public house somewhere hereabouts."

"It's a bit farther on, and a capital cook the landlord is, too," rejoined the other, who had already forgotten Herbert and his miseries; "these plantations are rare and handy for him."

"The plantations?"

"To be sure they are. Don't you see they

are full of game, and, watch them as they will, they can't prevent the hares coming and feeding in his garden, if they choose, and he snares them night after night amongst his parsley beds. And as for the woodcocks, he has quite as easy a way for them; and so the keepers watch and watch their eyes out, but Joe Tulley's pot always has a rare fat hare or a brace of birds stewing in it, watch as they will. His house is known far and wide by the profession; and I'll lay my life we find it crowded from cellar to attic."

"I'd rather seek out a less frequented place," rejoined Rudd, anxiously.

"You may go farther and fare worse, then; for there isn't a place within a dozen miles that wouldn't spurn the likes of you or me from it, as a fellow would a mangy dog from his own kennel. But here we are, and by the sounds I guess it's a high holiday inside with them."

And in truth the sounds of a fiddle, played with much taste and execution, at that moment saluted their ears, whilst their olfactory sense

was charmed by the odours of a delicious stew, which was at that instant simmering away upon the fire in the noisy and crowded kitchen, whilst a group of sturdy beggars sat sunning themselves on the benches without the door.

CHAPTER XI.

THE wayside inn to which Rudd's new companion ushered our two travellers was evidently, judging both from its exterior and interior, only frequented by the very pariahs of society. Without, the blackened and decaying walls, half stone, half timber, with the small, misshapen windows, wellnigh stuffed with rags, were in perfect keeping with the wild and lawless vagabonds that crowded the ill-lighted and fetid apartment into which it was the good luck of Herbert and his companions to be shown.

Imagine to yourself a room of the largest, but so low that a tall man could easily touch the highest rafters with his hand, from which, suspended by hoops, hung a dozen or two of guttering candles, that shed a lurid and murky light over all the squalid society beneath. These

candles blazed and flickered with every gust that swept around them; and it not unfrequently happened that some bold dancer, more adventurous than his compeers in executing a spirited shuffle, precipitated the whole affair in one grand crash, and involved the festive party in wellnigh utter darkness. Imagine also the fumes of stale tobacco and vile spirits which proceeded from every quarter, the oaths, and laughter, and snatches of song, the dust and heat, the grotesque garb and still more grotesque appearances of two-thirds at least of the revellers, and you have then as faithful a picture as I can give you of this *Beggars' Opera*.

The young and the nimble occupied the centre of the floor, tripping it merrily to the sounds of the fiddle which had attracted the attention of Hemp on approaching the house, and which was certainly played with great taste by a sturdy old vagabond, dressed as a sailor; the only claim to which character he possessed, I imagine, lay in his having had the good or ill luck to lose a leg in some drunken adventure in his youth,

and which had been the making of him, after all. All round the apartment were ranged small tables, and at these, with all the eagerness of inveterate gamblers, sat the seniors of the party, quarrelling over cards, which it would have defied any one but themselves to have been able to use, so entirely obliterated were their original characters.

Hemp, judging by the salutations he received on all hands, seemed a general favourite, and it was not very long before a buxom damsel, of twenty or thereabouts, who by her dress and manner was evidently a personage of some consideration, challenged him to a dance; a second did the same good turn to Rudd, but he gruffly declined, and withdrawing to a corner with the boy, sat looking moodily on, brooding over, in his own mind, what might occur when they at last reached Paris, a subject which had now become a part and parcel of his being, so entirely was his mind occupied with the determination of achieving the scheme he had now in hand.

They had not sat long before some one cried

out something which Rudd did not hear, and presently there was a general rush to the door. Dragging Herbert with him, Rudd went with the stream, and the next moment solved the mystery, when, on emerging from a dark passage, he found himself in another room, similar to the last, which was almost entirely occupied by a rude table, on which platters and cups were ranged, evidently for supper. Long settles, stuffed with straw, and furnished with backs, encircled the table, and these being presently filled with people, the repast commenced by a couple of sturdy lads, aided by the host, placing on the table a huge cauldron, that sent up a fragrant steam, quite as appetising and savoury as if Carême had been the presiding genius of its composition.

Rudd and Hemp ate like famished hounds, for they had had a long tramp and were very hungry; but Herbert, who shrank from the vicinity of so much lawless guilt, as if it had been the plague itself, sat trembling between the two men, scarcely daring to lift up his eyes

to the scene around him, leaving well-nigh untasted the smoking platter he had set out before him.

“Eat, my little fellow,” said Hemp, kindly, patting him on the head, “you will have a rough journey belike before you, to-morrow, and its ill travelling on an empty belly.”

“If the little fool is too dainty to fancy a poor man’s fare, why he must e’en starve,” growled Rudd, inflicting as he spoke a gratuitous kick over Herbert’s shins. “Come little ‘un, you must look spryish, for we haven’t much time to waste, thou knows.”

• Herbert made an effort to swallow, but it almost choked him. Hemp pushed a mug of water towards him, which he drained to the bottom. “Now try and eat a bit,” he whispered, grasping the little hot hand, and Herbert with the tears filling his eyes did so. Rudd, in the meantime, had got into earnest conversation with a man on his other hand, and did not notice either the action or the speech by which it was accompanied.

When supper was over, the landlord, Tully,

came round to get paid for the entertainment. Rudd paid for Herbert and himself, and then immediately resumed his conversation with his neighbour. After a time, the greater part of the company, including Rudd's companion, got up to go into the other apartment again, and Rudd also arose.

"What do you intend doing?" inquired Hemp, without stirring from his seat.

"I scarcely know. It is getting late," said Rudd, hesitating. "What do you say to a snooze?"

"Just what I want, and if you will be guided by me, I would propose that we should lie out to-night."

"Lie out?—how?"

"Oh, it's easy enough. Tully's beds are rather lively."

Rudd laughed surlily. "And what is your remedy?"

"There's a fine dry barn behind the house, full of straw, which I always use as a sleeping apartment, when I take this circuit," said Hemp, gaily.

“I vastly prefer it, I can assure you, to the miserable garret above.”

“Lead the way, then,” said Rudd, catching Herbert by the hand. “I can sleep on bare boards if necessary, messmate.”

Hemp needed no second bidding, but threading his way through the crowd, traversed the dark passage they had already crossed, and emerging into the open air, presently ushered them into the barn, which amply deserved his eulogies. The moon was so bright, (for it was near the full,) that when the door was opened, they could see nearly as well as in the day, and Rudd surveyed with gruff complacency their quarters for the night. As Hemp had foretold, there was plenty of clean straw, and this to men so jaded and tired as they were, was as welcome as beds of down—throwing off their shoes and coats, they were presently lying at full length in separate corners. Rudd, however, taking pretty good care that Herbert should be as near him as he possibly could, to prevent the possibility of escape.

The men were soon, as was evident from their

deep and heavy breathing, fast asleep; but Herbert, miserable and terror stricken, lay crying bitterly, but noiselessly to himself as his mind recurred again and again to the image of Eleanor and Cecil, as he last remembered them at Delaval—they haunted him in his dreams, even after he had sobbed himself to sleep.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, and found his companions already stirring.

“I suppose we can get a snack inside,” inquired Rudd of his new associate.

“Why hardly yet, I fancy—they are always very late a-bed after a spree of that sort—some one however must be stirring, and if you will wait here a minute, I’ll go and see,” and Hemp, with a sleepy yawn, strode towards the door.

“Get up, brat!” growled Rudd, seconding his mandate with a brutal kick, “it’s not for the likes of you to lay snoozing there.”

Herbert sprang to his feet in a moment, and stood with his little hands clasped in the attitude of supplication before his merciless tyrant, who, with an eye closed, lay on a truss of straw survey-

ing the poor little fellow with ferocious indifference.

“Are you hungry, whelp?” inquired the ruffian, after he had scanned his thin, haggard, wasted figure from head to foot.

“Yes, sir,” was the timid reply.

“Yes, sir,” growled Rudd, mimicking the tones of the boy’s voice, “and what the dickens right then have you to be hungry—didn’t I pay for your supper?”

The boy looked up for a moment, and there was a convulsive heaving visible of the throat, but he did not answer.

“Now I tell you what it is, young cock-sparrow,” said the man, with one of his savage looks, “you feign all this sulkiness and pretended misery to make folks think that I ill-treat you, but, by Jove, if I catch you once crying or fretting whilst we’re on tramp, I’ll murder you that instant. I will now, and so you may prepare yourself for your fate.”

Hemp at that moment entered with the news, that a dirty drab of a girl, half a-sleep still, was

busy getting breakfast for them in the kitchen, and that it would be ready in a few minutes.

"That's well," rejoined Rudd, darting a significant glance at Herbert, as he said, "Here boy, go into your corner until we call you again," a command which Herbert instantly obeyed.

"We could easily reach Dover to-night, if you were so inclined," said he, in a low tone, as soon as Herbert was out of hearing.

"We'll do so then by all means," rejoined Hemp, eagerly; "who knows what a day may bring about? I say, it's all sham, the story you trumped up about that boy being the son of the people you said he was."

"Who told you that?" demanded Rudd, fiercely, although he was very much alarmed. "Who told you he was not the brat I said he was?"

"I hadn't to go far," rejoined the other, with a surly smile; "they were talking of him in there last night."

"Damn them!" muttered Rudd to himself.

"The sooner you get the little fellow out of the country the better, I can tell you," said the

other, significantly. "I heard enough to warn you of that."

"What in the dicken's name did you hear?" demanded Rudd, foaming with baffled rage.

"Hush, he will hear you!" said Hemp, looking quickly round. "Sit down and I will tell you."

Rudd threw himself down at full length upon the straw, and fixing his fierce black eyes upon his companion, as if he could read him through and through, sat gnawing a straw between his teeth, as the other continued,—

"They were talking about you," said Hemp, in a deep whisper; "how you broke jail for that coining business, and coming down into these parts, picked up the boy again; for it seems you had had him in your clutches before. Was it not so?"

Rudd nodded, and Hemp went on.

"An honest fool of a smith, Natty somebody, they said, had the boy, and you stole him from him."

"Confound him, I did!" muttered Rudd, drawing his knees together, as if a sudden pain had seized him. "Well?"

Hemp paused a moment, and then altering his manner, said,—“The boy had a guardian, a villain who ill-used him, and from whom, it seems, he ran away; and this guardian, now thoroughly frightened—not for the boy’s safety, but for his own disgrace—is hunting the country for the brat.”

Rudd half sprang up, and then sank down again, as Hemp said, in a low tone,—“There was an old fellow in there, last night, who had been servant-man to this boy’s father, but had left, for the lad was born for some ill-deed. He didn’t know either you or the boy, as indeed none of them did; and he was talking how that this Colonel Clarendon, as he called him, and another, whose name I forget ——”

“Dalton?”

“Aye, Dalton—had been great friends, and that their two wives were both confined at the same time, when he was the only domestic with them; and that one being a boy, and the other a girl, Clarendon took both, and brought them up as his own.”

“ And whose was the boy ? ”

“ He could not tell. The surgeon that attended the two ladies had been sworn to secrecy, and he never knew. However, we have nothing to do with that, just now. The question is, How are we to get the boy quickly out of the country ? for I suppose you want him with you.”

“ At every hazard. His guardian will scarcely be likely to turn up here,” said Rudd, moodily.

“ Well, no ; I think we had better get breakfast, and start at once—eh ? ”

“ It’s the best plan we can adopt,” said Rudd, jumping up. “ Here, boy, follow us ! ” and the pair strode out of the barn.

The meal they found prepared for them was of the very coarsest, and the kitchen in which they ate it, in addition to its usual filth, had all the discomfort attendant upon being the scene of the over-night’s orgies. Herbert, however, goaded on by hunger, made what in his present circumstances must be considered a hearty meal, a fact which Mr. Hemp did not fail to notice. Immediately it was over, the two sprang to their

feet, and throwing down a shilling for their reckoning, strode out of the miserable den, Herbert limping painfully after them.

“Do you see that, little-un?” inquired Rudd, bringing his heavy cudgel in a line with Herbert’s eyes. “Very well, then; remember, the very first time I catch you loitering a yard behind, whack! it comes down across your back.”

And then brandishing it over his head to give him a wholesome terror of its vengeance, the ruffian strode out upon the highway at a good swinging walk, leaving Hemp and the boy to keep up with his huge strides as best they could.

CHAPTER XII.

THEY had not travelled far, before the morning, which until now had been fine, changed, and it began to rain heavily. Still the two men and the boy trudged wearily on, rarely exchanging a word, unless when an oath burst out as it were involuntarily, whenever a new sensation of chilliness warned them of the violence of the storm, and the inadequacy of their garments to shield them from its effects.

It was night when they entered Dover, foot-sore, weary, drenched to the skin, and with a sensation of craving hunger, worse than all the rest to bear. The night was dark, although it was summer, and the few people that were astir, shrunk from the gaunt, miserable beings that crawled past them, with their wild, streaming

hair, haggard countenances, and clothes from which the rain fell almost as rapidly as it descended upon them. Rudd alone strode on with the haughty bearing of an American savage, lowering and terrible, even in his present degraded misery, and with his bared breast, hirsute and shaggy, his wild, gleaming eyes, gigantic stature, wretched garb, and threatening aspect, made every one he met turn out of his path, and avoid him as if he had been a pestilence.

They gained a part of the town, at length, as miserable and degraded, apparently, as themselves, where the puddle lay ankle deep in the narrow lanes they traversed, and where a foetid odour diffused itself almost in a palpable shape to their quickened senses. From roof and kennel, from window-ledges and festering styes, the rain poured remorselessly down; yet miserable and untempting as was the scene, wretches, that were human only in shape, blocked up many a dark door-way they passed, as if the dark and stormy night without could not be more appalling than the hunger and want within. Then they would pass a public-

house, with the glare of the gas-lights flaming through the coarse red drapery that shrouded the lower windows, but which could not shut out—would that it could!—the wild burst of drunken revelry, the blasphemy, the discordant yells, and licentious songs, that circulated within.

Groups of drunken sailors now began to meet them, as they proceeded, several of whom pot valorously assailed them, as they passed, with scurrilous abuse, which Rudd was not slow in returning, after a more energetic fashion, which soon left two or three of their assailants sprawling in the dirt. Then Herbert felt the sea air stealing in, even over all the nauseous odours of the atmosphere; and presently, the clanking of cordage, and fluttering of sails, the hoarse cries out from shore, lights gleaming here and there, and dying away so rapidly, that they almost seemed like a delusion, until they sprang up again, perhaps fifty yards away—the sullen splash of the waves on the dark old quay, and all the sights and sounds that even in the darkest and dreariest of nights, infest any of our great seaports, told him that for the

present, his wanderings were well nigh over, and that rest and forgetfulness, at least, were at hand.

They stopped at last before a public-house of the lowest kind. Hemp, who had now become for the time the leader of the little party, saying that he would go in and reconnoitre, whilst they would remain without until he returned, Rudd assented, with his usual surly gruffness, and sitting down upon the edge of a wooden shed, surveyed the house before him as well as he could, by the dusky and uncertain twilight the murky atmosphere permitted the gas-lights to diffuse.

It had once been a grand old mansion, with galleries running the full length of the entire building, and was still in parts richly decorated with carved work, blackened with time and dirt, and mouldering to decay. Many of the huge windows were stopped up with blackened boards, that flapped and creaked with every driving gust of wind, whilst not a few of these that were still in active service were patched and repaired in a way much more significative of the cheapness of old rags than of the glass they had once been able

to boast of possessing. Blackened with soot, and mouldering to decay, it seemed the fitting haunt of the lawless characters the boy's imagination had already peopled it with; and it was not without a boyish thrill of terror that he followed Rudd and his companion into the dark and dirty passage that led to this house of guilt and degradation.

Opening a door, which closed again immediately they had entered, Hemp introduced them into a very large apartment, dimly lighted, and reeking with tobacco smoke, and ringing with the clash of fifty discordant voices, feminine as well as masculine. Most of the men were dressed in the garb of sailors; the women generally were only remarkable for their tawdry finery, although many were intoxicated as well. It was, in fact, only a repetition of the scene of the previous evening, although the garb of the actors was different, and their manners, if possible, still coarser and more licentious.

The towering height of Rudd instantly attracted the attention of several men in different parts of the room, who scrutinized his appearance with

evident interest, which he was not slow in returning with a scowling stare. Hemp, in the mean while, had been ordering a supper of cold meat and bread to be brought to them, and seating Herbert at his side, took care to help him before he began to eat himself.

“Take a drink; it will warm you rarely, after your weary day’s work, my little fellow,” he said, kindly, as he held a can of smoking mulled ale to the poor little fellow’s mouth. “Egad, I can tell you, my own bones ache woundily with cold themselves, and I wouldn’t care how soon I had these wet rags off my carcass, pal.”

“You’ll spoil that brat, Hemp,” growled Rudd, with his terrific scowl; “I’ll have a pretty breaking in of him again, I fancy, when we get over to Paris.”

“You’ll be more likely to send him to heaven, Rudd, then,” rejoined the other, more gravely. “Just look how thin and weak the poor little fellow is; it’s downright murder, breaking his spirit in that way.”

“Hang the brat’s spirit!” snarled the tyrant,

tearing his meat like a famished wolf; "hasn't the world broken your spirit and mine—eh?"

"Not mine, certainly."

Rudd surveyed him for a moment with a scornful smile, before he said, "You've had enough, comrade, apparently to do so, if it is not already done. Many a hungry day and houseless night the veriest fool may read to be stamped on your face."

"There are a few lines of that kind written on it, certainly, messmate," said a burly sailor, who sat alongside of Hemp, and who had listened almost unconsciously to the turn the conversation took; "but it takes more than poverty or want either to break a man's heart, in my opinion."

Rudd wheeled round, and glared upon the man with his hyæna eyes. The man returned his stare with a good-humoured smile, as he discharged a volume of smoke from the short, black pipe he had in his lips. He was a bluff, dark-eyed varlet, with grizzled hair, and bushy whiskers that looked as if every storm, from Labrador to the Indies, had blown upon them in

their time, and had such a girth of chest, and herculean strength of limb, that even Rudd mingled a surly civility with his speech, as he said,

“And what then, my hearty, does break a poor wretch’s heart, if want can’t?”

“A thing that we all have to answer for, more or less, messmate,” rejoined the other, readily. “Our sins.”

Rudd’s dark lip curled with a scornful smile at such a response in such a place. “We have all enow of them, at any rate,” he said, with a loud laugh.

“Your son?” demanded the other, eyeing Herbert with a commiserating glance.

“No, not exactly,” rejoined Rudd, moodily. “Can you detect any likeness, that you ask?”

“Not much; he’s a pretty boy, though.”

“We shall get no good sitting here in our wet clothes, Hemp,” said Rudd, who always disliked any notice to be taken of Herbert by strangers.

“Hadn’t we better be thinking of turning in, my man?”

“Our beds are ready, whenever you like,” said

Hemp, who had already spoken on that point to the coarse, bloated landlady.

Herbert was already nearly asleep, and was quite stiff from the effects of cold and fatigue. Hemp gave him a rousing shake, which brought him on his legs in a moment, and, followed by Rudd, elbowed his way through the noisy crowd of drinkers, until they were once again safely out of the room.

Their sleeping place was a miserable attic, with three hammocks slung at right angles across it, from which hung the dirty ends of the accompanying ragged counterpanes and blankets. Herbert sighed, and thought of his luxurious little bedroom at Delaval, with its elegant French bed, hung with rose-coloured silk curtains, the snowy bedclothes, the pictures in their gold frames, hanging on the green walls, and the jessamine that sent its rare perfume through the open windows; then Eleanor, and Cecil, and his dead father, came flocking through his mind, and his eyes swam with the tears he durst not shed, lest they should call down a fresh beating from Rudd.

“Come, bustle, you young imp, and get those wet duds off,” growled Rudd, giving him a shove that nearly threw him down. “We’ll have no snivelling in the morning, *harkeé*, after all this work. Ill or well, dead or alive, you go on with me and Hemp there.”

“I’m weary and cold enough myself to fancy myself ill,” rejoined Hemp, shivering from head to foot, as he proceeded to divest himself of his soaking clothes; “that whiskey, too, was as hot—”

“As a certain place you and I know only too well,” retorted Rudd, fiercely, for he was beginning to domineer even over Hemp, so haughty and tyrannical was his disposition.

“Speak for yourself, friend,” growled Hemp, not over well pleased, apparently, at the supposition, as he assisted Herbert to strip. “Your little fingers, my man, are ready to drop off, I see, they shake so.”

“I’ll shake them after another fashion, presently,” snarled Rudd, turning his wolfish eyes upon the pair. “Let that boy alone, pal.”

Hemp still continued his occupation.

“D’ye hear, you hound?” shouted the ruffian, desisting from his own employment, but without rising.

“And if I do, neighbour, what of it?” retorted Hemp composedly. “Ain’t I doing an act of kindness to the boy?”

“Kindness! You’re a snivelling, undermining ass, Hemp, with your affectation of pity for that beggar’s brat, and you want to get him out of my clutches into your own; but I see your drift, my pretty man, and I’m blessed if I’ll stand it. Leave that boy alone, I say!”

“Not for your bidding, bully Rudd,” rejoined Hemp, who kept one eye on his man, whilst he continued his occupation. “You can easily see the boy can’t undress himself, he’s so done up with cold and fatigue.”

“Then I’ll make you, my hempen cove, that’s all,” cried Rudd, springing towards him, and the next moment Herbert was flung to the wall, and the two men grappled fiercely with each other, a muttered oath, or a baffled yell being the only accompaniment of the terrific struggle itself.

Both were nearly naked, having already divested themselves of their coats, shirts, and stockings, which lay in a huddled heap upon the floor. Rudd's herculean arms, covered with black, coarse hair, were twined round the slimmer waist of his antagonist, who, although so much slighter a man, displayed on this occasion a strength but little inferior to that of his competitor. Rudd's gigantic figure towered the full head and shoulders above him, swaying him backward and forward like a sapling in a tornado, yet failing with all his strength to dislodge the deadly grasp Hemp had caught of his throat, and from the effects of which he was already black in the face.

"Death or submission," yelled Hemp, whose blood, now thoroughly roused, made him deadly as a tiger, as he tightened his grasp, until the blood gushed from Rudd's nose and mouth.

The latter's only response was a convulsive struggle that almost overthrew his more skilful, yet weaker, antagonist, and for a moment a wild gleam of joy shot through the ruffian's heart, as he felt Hemp totter beneath him. He did not, however, fall, and again his grasp tightened like

that of a vice upon his foe, for he had learned how to strangle a fellow-being amongst the blood-thirsty Thugs of India, and Rudd's fate was now apparently sealed for ever.

"You shall die now, then," retorted Hemp, with a savage chuckle, that the other heard even in the horrible agony he suffered; and the next moment there was heard a rattling of the throat, the eyes seemed starting from their sockets, the arms fell down with a convulsive movement against the sides of the body, which, on being released from his grasp by Hemp, fell with a heavy, deadly sound upon the floor, and lay upon its face apparently lifeless.

In a moment Hemp was at Herbert's side, and was dragging him towards the door.

"You must fly with me, or they'll hang you up by the neck, poor fool!" he cried hoarsely; "or if he comes to life again, he will murder you instead." And, as he spoke, he had opened the door, and was half way down the crazy stairs, the frightened child scarcely feeling that he breathed, amidst the dizzy terror that filled his soul. For-

tunately the door was still wide open, for the house was not yet drained of its guests, and, still clasping his hand with the tenacity of a vice, Hemp dragged Herbert out after him into the wet and deserted streets.

It was still raining heavily, for it had never ceased all the day, and a cold piercing wind had started up, that searched them to the very heart.

"Confound it!" growled Hemp, foaming at the mouth, after they had run some distance, and had now slackened their pace to gain their breath; "we have forgot our clothes!"

"Shall we not return for them, sir?" demanded the boy, who did not feel the same terror for Hemp that he did for Rudd.

"Return! to be put in limbo, and swung for that villain's murder," growled Hemp, stamping with his foot in his vexation. "No! no! no! a thousand deaths rather than that—but what shall we do?"

Herbert's only response was an audible shiver, as the cold racked his tender frame.

Hemp looked down upon his little companion

at this moment, as they stood beneath one of the few straggling lamps that, at that season of the year, were lighted along the quay. Herbert's face was lividly pale, his hair hanging in tangled locks, and dripping with rain, whilst his slight and boyish frame seemed pinched and contracted with cold. Ruffian as he was, the man could feel tenderly for the poor little outcast, as was evident from the endearing manner with which he patted his icy cheek, and spoke a few kind words of encouragement, which seemed to fall, as it were, almost insensibly from his lips.

A dense fog shrouded the neighbouring waters from their view, and the road they were now upon was so badly paved, and full of deep ruts, that Herbert's new protector was compelled to relinquish his hand, and let him follow him as nimbly as he could. They had not walked fifty yards before Hemp felt himself completely at fault:—the lamps had disappeared, along with every vestige of human life, whilst, turn which way they would, the sullen boom of the sea fell with a startling terror upon his senses.

“We must endeavour to discover an outlet, boy,” he muttered, striving in vain to pierce the dense bank of fog that seemed to shut out all chance of progress, as effectually as it did that of discovering where they were. “I can see something out there, dancing up and down, as if it was a light in the bay—hist! there is some one bawling behind;” and again the baffled wretch paused like a bewildered fox when the hounds are in sight, and all chance of escape seems cut off.

Again the voice was heard bawling behind them, and apparently approaching the place they occupied; and now re-assured that there was land in that direction, Hemp sprang forward, bidding Herbert follow him as carefully as he could, but before the boy could start up from the stone he had sunk down upon, a splash was heard mingled with an oath, and the next moment Hemp was buffeting the waves for his life.

“Hell and fury!” he roared madly, “can you not get a boat out—help! help!” and then a mountainous wave swept him fifty yards out from the pier, the cold spray sweeping through his hair,

blinding his eyes, numbing trunk and limb, and almost choking him as he gasped for breath; then he caught a glimpse of a light on shore. They were coming to his rescue, perhaps; and there he was, sinking before their very eyes! He was growing benumbed and powerless, although the mind was as active as ever, and a thousand horrible phantoms, even in that moment of despair, flitted through his brain, and then the mad waves tossed him hither and thither as easily as a child throws a feather on the breeze—a few more fearful struggles, and Hemp sunk to rise no more!

“There is something white sitting on the stone there,” said one of the men, as they pulled back again to shore. “The poor fellow has left a little one to battle with the world.”

It was poor little Herbert.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was the gayest of all gay haunts, that hotel in the Chausse d'Antin, where Cecil now found himself regularly installed as one of the family, without either question or challenge as to the relationship he held to its owners, to entitle him to such an easy and agreeable footing. Dalton's will, like "Le Roi il veut!" with which the sovereign declares his gracious permission, was law from attic to cellar; and Dalton willed it that his young *compagnon de voyage* should be welcomed as an honoured guest in his mansion as long as he chose to remain in it.

Dalton's wife, who still possessed that rare and imperishable loveliness which owes its charm more to intellectual beauty than sensual, and who was still in the August of her age, seemed

to attach herself to the young man from the first, and would often sit with her fine dark eyes fixed upon his manly countenance, which, shifting and changing as an April day, seemed at times, to a third observer, to catch something of her own lofty expression, although the character of the two faces was essentially different.

Camilla—the sprightly Camilla—whom Alfred de Vigny likened to Ariel, so fantastic, and tricky, and *spirituelle* was she; and whom Alexandre Dumas would have certainly immortalised in one of his thousand-volume romances, had not the revolution just at this juncture driven his kingly protector into exile, and himself into the Gazette;—Camilla alone uniformly treated poor Cecil with a cold politeness, and studied reserve, which bitterly offended his pride, and very effectually prevented his doing the very ridiculous folly of falling violently in love with this charming incarnation of the graces.

In sooth, Camilla was a very terrible personage indeed in her own immediate circle. Lovely she might be declared to be by some people, although

after the first five minutes you were in her company, you found yourself totally forgetting whether her face was pale or rosy, or her hair blonde or dark; or whether her figure owed its grace more to its classical shape, or sprightly carriage. It was not to any of these, however, that Camilla owed her prestige, nor yet to the reputed wealth of her father, although no people in all the world have a greater reverence for a well-filled purse, than have your true Parisians. Camilla was a "*femme incompréhensible*,"—an incomprehensible so completely changing with every hour that she fairly killed all her lovers from sheer hard work, and had now been two months, one week, three days and a quarter, without having had a single sonnet penned to her eyebrow, or the ghost of an ode on her manner of singing the *Casta Diva*. Then too, her taste or dress would have been exquisite even in a Parisian, but in a daughter of "Perfide Albion," it was absolutely miraculous, and added to her saucy wit and sprightly manners, it intoxicated you very much the same as a bumper

of champagne would do before dinner; it was so pungent, and so audacious, at the same moment.

Cecil was absent one evening,—a rather unusual thing with him, but he had accepted a vacant seat in a certain Sir Algernon de Vere's curricie to Neuilly, when Camilla came, bounding graceful as a fawn, into the room in which Dalton and his wife were sitting, apparently discussing old times between them, from the gravity of their demeanour, and the subdued tone in which they had been talking.

Dalton looked up as his daughter approached, and a majestic smile for a moment lighted up his lofty features as he gazed upon the radiant beauty of the wilful, yet generous-hearted girl, who the next moment was encircling his neck with her beautiful arm, whilst her dewy lip impressed a kiss upon his brow. It was a charming picture: the rich sunset, and, chastely furnished apartment, with its decorations in the style of Louis Quinze—the lovely girl clinging to that stately and still handsome man, as gracefully as a vine throws its tendrils round the sturdy

oak,—and the mother, scarcely past the midsummer of her age. And Dalton felt the hallowing influence of the season and scene, and his lips moved involuntarily a thanksgiving to the Divine Being, who had blessed him with so much happiness even in this world.

At that moment, Cecil entered the room, accompanied by several young men, one of the handsomest of whom approached Camilla, whilst Cecil and his companions advanced to Dalton and his wife.

Dinner was at that moment announced, and Cecil went up to Camilla, who usually took his arm on these occasions; but Camilla was in one of her incomprehensible humours, and chose to take the arm of Sir Algernon de Vere, whom she usually neglected, simply because he was handsome and rich: the young man smiled and shrugged his shoulders, and to console himself began to talk with Dalton, of England.

In the midst of their conversation, a servant came to say that a man was asking for Cecil, who would take no refusal.

“Tell the man Mr. Clarendon is at dinner,” said his host.

The footman went out with the message, and presently returned, with some curiosity visible on his countenance. The man had said that Mr. Clarendon must see him instantly, as life and death were at issue in the interview, and Cecil went out accordingly, promising to be back presently. An hour elapsed, and he had not returned.

CHAPTER XIV.

It will be necessary to go back to Jasper Vernon's proceedings, to learn who the man was who had called Cecil away so unceremoniously from his dinner; and if the reader has not forgotten the scene that took place at his house on the morning when Herbert was discovered to be missing, we will, with his leave, resume the thread of Master Jasper's proceedings at that juncture, and leave Herbert for a time to his fate.

For a day or two, then, Jasper Vernon troubled himself but little about Herbert's disappearance, fondly expecting that the boy would return as soon as he found from actual experience, that it was not so easy to live upon air as truant school-boys generally imagine. A couple of days—nay,

a week elapsed, and still Herbert did not appear.

Then Jasper began to be very terribly frightened. Not for the child, however, for his safety troubled him but little, but if Herbert was lost or dead, how could he dare to meet Cecil and that terrible Dalton, of whom he had heard so much, but had never seen, and who was equally with himself an executor of Colonel Clarendon, and the guardian of his children.

He did not do what most men in his situation would. He did not send men out in every direction to endeavour to discover, and to bring back the fugitive. He certainly wrote to the county constable of the district, describing Herbert's appearance and age, and offering a handsome reward to whoever discovered him; and then, with a strange fatality which he felt to be so, even when committing it, he, on the eighth morning from Herbert's flight, sent for a post chaise from the next town, and set off for Leven, to consult Lady Susan Clarendon as to what should be done in this emergency.

Fortunately, Lady Susan was alone when Jasper Vernon, weary, dusty, and out of temper, was announced. It was dark even in the shrubberies, as he knew, for he had left the chaise at the lodge gates, for the sake of avoiding observation; but it was still darker in the gloomy old room into which Duncan Mc Graw ushered him, without the formality of announcing his name.

Jasper was a coward inherently, as villains generally are; and, above and beyond all other people, he dreaded the haughty old lady who now rose up on his entrance. It was very dark, or she would have seen how his cheek blanched, and his step quivered, as he saluted her.

"Are you here again, and so soon, Jasper?" said she, as he crept with the noiseless tread of an Indian cat over the velvet carpet, and without extending her hand, as was her wont.

"I am, Lady Susan," was the brief reply. "There was a curse surely on me when I first undertook the management of my cousin Clarendon's affairs."

"What has gone wrong?" demanded his

coadjutor, in an apparently unmoved tone, although she was internally agitated. "Have you still no tidings of Herbert, Jasper?"

"None at all," was the gloomy response.—
"Where is Eleanor, madam?"

"Out, I believe—but Herbert?—what can have become of him?" demanded Lady Susan, trembling from head to foot, as she resumed her seat. "What do you mean, Jasper, by mystifying me in this manner?"

"Simply, then, Lady Susan, as you know, Herbert has disappeared from my house!—In fact, it is to consult you in this emergency, that I have come down hither.—What must we do?"

"Do? what have you done, pray?"

"Almost nothing—I have written to the chief constable of our district, describing the child, and what more could I do?"

"Everything!—You should have scoured the country in every direction; should have questioned every beggar as to whether a child answering Herbert's description had been met with in the company of suspicious people; you should have

searched high and low—never rested nor slept until you had the boy once more within your clutches, and then——”

“I have thrashed him within an inch of the varlet’s life,” growled her auditor.

“No. You should then have striven by kindness and affection to have won the boy’s future confidence. God help me, that I have lived to see this day!” and real, genuine heart’s-tears welled up from those cold grey eyes that had never wept, even when the brave and the beautiful—her heart’s treasures—had gone down in the heyday of life to an untimely grave.

The old lady of Leven wept on unrestrainedly. Jasper Vernon gnawed his finger-nails, and endeavoured to discover some clue as to what should be done next in his own crafty but bewildered brains.

The butler brought in candles, and placed them on a side table. Lady Susan wiped her eyes, and turned them with a scornful glance upon her companion. He was still sitting with his head buried on his breast, thinking.

She did not break the silence just then, for she was deeply moved. I let you see the letter she had written to this very man who now sat over against her, only a few short days before, in which she told him how she loathed the idea of forcing Eleanor to marry but of her own free will; and you who read that letter must have seen how her mind was torn, between her compact with the villain at her side, and her newly discovered and tender affection for Eleanor.

Then her mind reverted again to the loss of Herbert; the grief it would cause to Eleanor, whom, as I have said, she loved ardently, notwithstanding the flinty heart she had shown to the world for well-nigh half a century; the anger of Cecil, and the vengeance of that terrible being, Edward Dalton—that man whom Colonel Clarendon's English friends pictured to themselves almost as a disembodied spirit wandering from pole to pole, but whom we have just left sitting down to his luxurious dinner in the best house in the Chaussée d'Antin, with his wife and daughter by his side; and again Lady Susan shuddered, as

she tried to think what would be best to do in this terrible emergency.

Suddenly Jasper Vernon looked up, and their eyes met. It was evident his unfertile mind had not hit upon any scheme, for the next moment his eyes again sought the ground, with a hard, icy look, that might have frozen a stone.

Lady Susan had in the meanwhile moved her seat, and now faced him.

"There is only one thing you can now do," she said.

He looked up again with a brightening eye.

"Mr. Cecil Clarendon is at present in Paris. I have his address, for Eleanor had a letter from him only yesterday. Send some one instantly to him, on whom you can depend, and summon him to your assistance. It will look honest, at all events, and, if Herbert should not cast up again, why, the weight is removed from your shoulders in part.

"If you have no one you could intrust with such a mission," continued Lady Susan, "send Norman Macdonald, who would go to the world's

end to win a smile from poor Eleanor. Do you hear, simpleton?" she asked, impatiently, when he did not immediately answer.

Jasper shrugged his shoulders as he asked, "Have you no other scheme, Lady Susan, to propose?"

"None!" was the decisive answer; "adopt that or leave it, as you choose, and I stick to or abandon you."

"And employ this Norman Macdonald, say you?"

"Certainly: it will serve a double purpose. You will gain a trusty messenger, and the service itself will recommend him to Eleanor Clarendon as well."

"I wish they were married," muttered the executor, gloomily, as the latter words of Lady Susan's speech recalled another of his schemes to his mind.

"Why, Jasper?"

"At another time I will tell you; but not now. Where can this same Master Macdonald be met with?"

"I will send a man over instantly on horseback, desiring him to come immediately after breakfast in the morning," said her ladyship, decisively. She then rang the bell, and ordered supper.

"Do you wish to see Eleanor?" she inquired, as a sudden thought struck her. "I think you had better not."

"So do I, as it will save me answering no end of troublesome questions about Herbert. Besides, I am very tired," he added, with a yawn.

Lady Susan's stern features relaxed into a smile, but she did not speak; and when the footman brought in the supper-tray, merely desired Eleanor's maid to tell her young mistress she was employed with a gentleman on business, and would not see her again that night.

Norman Macdonald arrived before Jasper Vernon was out of his dressing-room the next morning. He, however, had the advantage of a long interview with Lady Susan, which probably made him more tractable when Jasper really did come down, for he professed the utmost eagerness

to be off, and declared he would nèver slacken rein until he reached the coast.

“Do not alarm him unnecessarily,” was Jasper’s parting advice; “you don’t know Mr. Cecil Clarendon as I do, or you would know him to be one of the most hot-headed young men in existence.”

Norman only heard one half of the sentence, for he was out of hearing long before Jasper had finished. “He won’t let the ground cool under him,” said the latter, turning round upon Lady Susan; “that young fellow’s face and figure would make his fortune in London, madam.”

“Norman has a very pretty property of his own,” was the old lady’s response, “and has no occasion to cross his humour to add to it.”

CHAPTER XV.

“WHATEVER can have become of Cecil?” said Dalton, for the tenth time, when the dinner having been removed, the dessert was at length placed upon the table. “Did you see the party, Gibbons, whom he went out with?” turning to the groom of the chambers, as he spoke.

“I did not, sir,” said Gibbons, who was an Englishman, and having accompanied his master in many of his wanderings, when a younger man, was consequently a great favourite with him. “Johnson describes him as being a young man, pretty much of Mr. Clarendon’s own age, and very dirty, as if he had just come off a long journey.”

“It is really very mysterious,” muttered Dalton, glancing over to his wife, who evidently shared

his alarm, although she retained her usual quiet self-possession. "If I did not know that Cecil can have no enemies in Paris, and is strong and resolute as well, I could feel seriously alarmed about him."

"Mr. Clarendon is an excellent fencer," said the Marquis de Boissy, a witty eccentric, who was enormously rich, and who subsequently married the notorious Countess Guiccoli. "He nearly killed Dubois yesterday at the Circle."

"I did not know Mr. Clarendon fenced," was Dalton's abstracted answer. "Camilla, my love, you have not touched your harp to-day."

"I am quite *triste* to-day, papa," said the lively soubrette, with a sigh. "I am sure we shall hear of some great calamity very shortly, I am so very miserable."

"Do your regrets always precede your misfortunes, Miss Dalton?" said De Boissy, with a Frenchman's shrug of the shoulders. "If so, you must, at times, feel rather bewildered between the cause and the effect!"

"But do you not often feel the same sensation,

monsieur?" demanded Camilla, turning her large lustrous eyes upon the face of the old voluptuaire; "I can assure you, I always anticipate an evil beforehand."

"I never discuss metaphysics after dinner," said the old marquis, gallantly; "but whom, in the name of all the gods, have we here?" he added, as Cecil, pale, breathless, and agitated, rushed into the room. "Mr. Cecil Clarendon must surely have seen the ghost of his grandmother—and, who is that very handsome young man he brings along with him—Diable! he has never introduced him!"

In truth, Cecil was far too agitated to think of any such thing at that moment. In a voice broken with emotion, he staggered up to Dalton, and said—

"I could not leave you without saying farewell, best of friends!"

"Farewell!" echoed Dalton, in astonishment, starting up; "you surely do not intend to leave us?"

"I must set off instantly! This gentleman—

allow me to introduce Mr. Norman Macdonald—has ridden, night and day, from Scotland, and is, I regret to say, the bearer of very bad news, which compels me to return with him to England.”

“Come with me into the library,” said Dalton, rising. “Gibbons, send lights, and some wine. Mr. Macdonald, will you do us the favour to accompany Mr. Clarendon and myself—perhaps your departure need not be so sudden; and I may then have the pleasure of presenting you to my wife and daughter;—gentlemen, excuse me for a time!” and, sincerely alarmed at the little he had heard, the excellent Dalton led the way to the library, and made the two young men sit down.

“Drink a glass of wine, Cecil, before you tell me your news,” said he kindly. “Mr. Macdonald, allow me to pledge you to our future acquaintance!” and for the first time, his eye fell upon the graceful figure and handsome features of poor Norman.

Cecil seized the wine, and drank it with avidity, although his hand trembled so violently that he could scarcely guide the glass to his lips.

“Tell him, tell him!” he gasped, turning to Norman, in agony, after attempting vainly to speak; “tell him all, and as quietly as you can!” he cried, bursting into tears.

“I am afraid your communication is likely to prove a very painful one, sir,” said Dalton, turning kindly to Norman; “pray take your own time, so that you acquaint me fully with what has happened.”

“It is told in a very few words, Mr. Dalton,” said Norman, gravely. “Herbert Clarendon, I am sorry to say, has disappeared from his guardian Mr. Vernon’s house, and cannot be found!”

Dalton rose up in great agitation, and then sank down again, staring wildly at the young man’s pale face for several minutes without speaking; then he glanced sadly over to Cecil, and the tears filled those stern, dark eyes, as he gasped out, “Herbert Clarendon missing!—that poor child who was the darling of my good friend’s heart?”

“Herbert has really not been heard of for more than a fortnight,” said Norman, in a low voice.

“ I will make the villain pay dearly for this treachery,” muttered Dalton, fiercely ; “ there is foul play at the bottom of all this.—God of heaven, can he know all, and has he put this poor child out of the way for the sake of furthering his own base ends ! ”

Then looking up, he inquired whether Herbert had been either seen or heard of since his disappearance from Jasper Vernon’s house.

“ Never ! it is very singular ; and with a man of worse reputation than Mr. Vernon bears, it would in my opinion look very suspicious,” said Norman, frankly.

A bitter smile passed across Dalton’s haughty features, but he did not speak. His suspicions, at any rate, were now fully confirmed, and he on the instant said, “ Whenever you propose to return, Cecil and I will accompany you ; if you have ridden all night, you will require some rest, and my hotel is heartily at your service.”

“ If it is not intruding too much on Mr. Dalton’s hospitality,” began Norman.

“ Hut-tut ! I only regret the occasion is so

unpleasant a one that brings you here, Mr. Macdonald," said Dalton, with grave politeness. "Cecil, my dear boy, do not give way to idle sorrows; we shall find poor Herbert, depend upon it."

He took the young man's hand, as he spoke, and pressed it kindly; he felt it shake, as he did so, although no emotion was visible in the stern, pale face Cecil turned upon him in return; nothing but a terrible despair.

"I will order coffee to be brought in here," said Dalton, rising to ring the bell; "Your news, sir, I am sure has made both Cecil and myself unfit for the company we have just left."

A footman appeared.—"William, tell your mistress," said he, "that urgent business will prevent my joining our friends again this evening:—let us have some coffee, and a few cutlets as well; and harkee, don't let us be disturbed to-night."

He then turned to his guests, and strove to drive away the gloom that was but too visible on their countenances. In this, however, he

was not so successful as he anticipated, Cecil's mind being already filled with the most gloomy forebodings as to Herbert's fate, whilst Norman was really grieved on account of the distress any misfortune happening to the latter would occasion to Eleanor. It was, therefore, only a very sad party after all; and it still wanted an hour of midnight, when the two young men bade Dalton good night, and retired to rest.

Dalton sat for some time absorbed in thought, after his companions had left him, and then going to his secretary, took out a large package of papers, which was none other than a copy of Colonel Clarendon's will, together with a bundle of discoloured letters, which his unfortunate friend had written to him many, many happy years before, when in the heyday of life and prosperity. He had never dreamed, when writing them, that a time would come when the sight of them would call up the scalding tears to those stern eyes; and yet it was so, and the iron-hearted Dalton wept like a child, as he perused many a gay and wild adventure, the joyousness

of which fell like a leaden weight upon his heart, at the present moment.—They had been written in the full confidence of youthful feeling, to a friend to whom he was tenderly attached, and now that friend was left like a lonely tree in the forest, to mourn over the downfall of the friend and companion of his youth.

Then he got up, and locked the will and the letters away, and stood for several minutes on the floor, like one striving to conquer his own thoughts; bitter enough, God knows! they were,—more bitter, perhaps, because,—but why should we hasten to unravel the future?

He took up a lamp, and went to his wife's bedroom. She was partially undressed, and was sitting, in a loose white robe, at a table, reading intently, as he entered. Dalton saw at a glance that it was the sacred volume, and he hesitated to intrude his own earthly regrets upon her at such a moment.

Much as this amiable woman revered her husband, I can assure you that he worshipped her still more. Her religion was so pure and

unearthly, her temper so angelic, that a feeling of the tenderest awe always pervaded his mind whenever he approached her, and this feeling at this moment filled his mind.

"I wished to speak with you, Clara; but I see you are engaged," he began, in a low voice.

Mrs. Dalton closed the book, and rising, took his hand; he kissed her affectionately on the forehead; and seating her gently in her chair again, drew another close to it, and sat down.

"You look very sad, Edward," she began, with her sweet voice, so inexpressibly dear to his ears.

"I am—a terrible misfortune has happened."

Her face grew as pale as a lily, as she gazed upon his gloomy countenance, and caught its despairing expression. "I am afraid, Clara, God is about to punish us for our miserable deception, at length."

Mrs. Dalton sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands. "What has happened?" she asked, at length.

"The boy has disappeared."

"Herbert?"

“Yes; and no clue can be obtained to his discovery.”

With a strong effort Mrs. Dalton looked up and said, “And have you told Cecil what we have so long concealed, Edward?”

“I did not; how could I, at such a moment?”

“Then I will tell him! I almost did so, Dalton, when I first pressed him to my heart, for it almost burst with the bliss of that moment. Send him to me, and allow me to break the news to him. From a mother’s lips——”

“Clara, my dearest love, you must not attempt to do so at such a moment as this. He is too strongly moved just now to receive such a communication as he ought. I am sure—in fact, he would not believe it.”

“But the proofs——”

“Only prove a part. It would ruin all to tell him such a wild and improbable story—although it is perfectly true — at such a time. At a calmer moment, when Herbert’s fate is disposed of, we will acquaint him with all.”

“Oh! Dalton, why did we ever deceive him?—

so generous, so pure, so noble, he will hate us for ever when he learns how mean and pitiful was the subterfuge to which we had recourse. We! whom he should love and reverence so dearly."

Dalton took the pale, cold hand that was lying over his chair, and pressed it to his heart.

"Let him, Clara, if he can," he said, proudly. "But I know Cecil too well to believe him capable of such ingratitude. A miserable necessity compelled us to adopt an alternative which promises to involve us in so much after-remorse and grief; he may despise us if he chooses, but our own hearts acquit us of everything but misfortune. But we will not despair until we know that poor Herbert is really dead, and that, I trust, will be spared us. I am going to set off in the morning with these young men for England, to prosecute the search for the boy. God bless you, dearest! and folding her in his arms, he imprinted another kiss upon her cheek, and left the apartment.

"What has distressed you, mamma," cried Camilla Dalton, a few minutes afterwards, as

she glided as lightly as a fawn into the apartment; and then perceiving that Mrs. Dalton's pale face was stained with the traces of tears, she flung herself with a startled cry upon her knees, and encircled the yielding form of her parent in her arms.

"Your father is going to return to England in the morning," she said, with as much composure as she could assume.

"And leave us behind!" murmured Camilla, pouting. "I am so tired of Paris, madame!"

"And yet you loved it so dearly at first," said her mother, in a tone of gentle reproof.

"I love everything new, mamma! new faces, new scenes, new sensations, new friends!"

"Ah! Camilla, when you have lived as long as I have in the world," said this admirable woman, "you will have learned that one old friend is worth a hundred new ones—one honest friend!"

CHAPTER XVI.

“WE mun take this little chap home, Joc, I’s e warrand,” said one of the men who had put off in the boat in the vain attempt to save poor Hemp; “devil or devil’s imp, he munna sit there like a poor seagull all through the night.”

“We have mouths enow to feed, messmate,” growled the other man testily: “there’s t’oud woman, and me, and Nell, and thy five little uns.”

“Why, that’s only eight; Joe and Bell has eleven,” rejoined the other, in a checring, manly voice; “besides, Nell always says there’s a blessing upon one whenever poor folk like us can do a good deed, and it’s a real charity taking this poor little fellow home, if only for one night.”

"I don't know as to that, Jabez," growled the other testily; "there may or there may not; but have thy way as thou always has. Hallo! little 'un, ist asleep, or what?"

"Sound as a top," said the other, stooping down to see Herbert's features. "Look, Joe, what delicate cheeks the poor little boy has! Nell will be mortal glad to have 'un for a bit."

"Humph! give him a shake, and take hold of his hand, Jabez," growled the other, testily; "why surely, the boy must be dead; he sleeps so sound."

The younger boatman, who was the individual styled Jabez, gave Herbert a pretty rough shake, which had the immediate effect of making the poor little fellow start up with a foreboding cry, for he had forgotten the events of the last few hours, and imagined Rudd was ordering him to get up. When he opened his eyes, however, a different sight greeted him, and he gazed for several minutes, quite bewildered, from one to the other, without speaking.

One of the boatmen was a little withered old

man; almost bent double with toil or age, with grey hair, and withered skin that hung in yellow wrinkles on his cheeks; his shaggy eye-brows scarcely concealed the glittering eyes that still burned behind them, and his face wore an avaricious expression, in painful contrast with the marks of age he presented; he had a thin, wheezing voice, which had the power of making itself painfully heard, no matter how high the din that was raging around him; and whenever he spoke, his attenuated frame shook spasmodically, as if the mind that animated it threatened at every moment to separate itself from the frail tenement of clay it inhabited.

“Aye! aye! take the brat home, Jabez, if thou wilt,” cried this automaton, with one of his most violent spasms; “only if thou does, dunna lay the blame on me, if we have to keep him for good and all. His dad, thou sees, was drowned before our eyes, and it will be a pretty long day, I warrant, before any of his kith or kin are likely to make an outcry after him.”

“God will surely not punish a poor man like

me, Father Joe, for taking pity on such a poor, helpless fellow as this," retorted the other, patting Herbert's head; "so come along, my little fellow, and I'll make thee heartily welcome to a mess of stew and a bed for one night, at all events."

"You see, Joe," said he in continuation, as Herbert trotted alongside of them, speaking in in his deep, earnest tones, "I can never see a little fellow as this may be, without remembering my own little Billy; thou knows how Nell and I have mourned and mourned over that poor little fellow, fancying all kinds of miseries for him ever since he strolled away from our door; and who knows but a good turn done to this little fellow may make some good christian be as kind to him?—ah dearie! dearie! what weary hearts Nell and I have had all along of that poor fellow."

A few tears trickled down his weatherbeaten features as the thought of his poor, lost child wandering, starving with hunger, from door to door, and perhaps lying down at some hedge-side to die, passed through his mind; and then he

clutched Herbert's hand more tightly, and strode on for some time without speaking.

"My mind often misgives me that he's dead," he resumed after a long pause; "and yet, for the life of me, I can never venture to say so to Nell, she clings so woundily to the hope that he will one day turn up, a fine, handsome, well-grown fellow. It would kill her, Joe, to pull that last prop from under her."

"Better think the worst at once," growled Joe, who was Nell's father, and consequently grandfather to the missing Billy, with grim stoicism; "women go on teasing and worritting themselves to death about such trifles: han't you got brats enow wi'out Bill?"

"No, Father Joe! Billy was our first; and whatever men may think, they always let their hearts cling to their first-born with a stronger love than they ever have to give to those that follow: and then Billy was so lithe and handsome."

"Like yourself, Jabez," chuckled the old man, maliciously.

“No, no, Father Joe—he was Nell’s image,” rejoined the other, good-humouredly, though sadly; “you’ve said so yourself, fifty times.”

“May be I have, and may be I haven’t,” rejoined the other, bitterly; “but, howsomever, it’s no use fretting—and here’s the house—you may take all the blame upon yourself.”

“That I will, and welcome,” retorted the other, cheerfully, opening the door of a small cottage, and admitting a broad, ruddy stream of light upon the dismal night. “What cheer, Nell, my lass? I’ve brought thee a poor little fellow to get a night’s lodging and a belly-full of victuals; I know thou’ll do that, my old woman.”

Jabez’s old woman, who was a stout, buxom woman of five-and-thirty, or thereabouts, gave a cordial assent to this proposition; and noticing Herbert’s wet clothes and weary appearance, set herself busily to work to get him undressed, and then commenced rigging him out in a non-descript suit, the jacket of which was a world too large, and hung in huge folds about him;

whilst the trousers were so small that they fairly gave in at the knees, and left the rest of his legs without any covering at all.

Ridiculous as his new costume was, the cheerful blaze of the fire made the little room look and feel so comfortable, that Herbert soon felt much more contented and happy than he had done for weeks before ; and when, Nell having folded back the cuffs of his jacket to enable his hands to do their office, the supper was placed on the table, diffusing, as it did, a rich, unctuous, appetising vapour through the apartment, and a huge mess of stew, was set before him, he felt such a glow at his heart that his feelings fairly overcame him, and the tears began to trickle silently down his face.

The sight of the delicious mess had a humanising effect even upon old Joe, whose sarcastic, grey eye lost its habitual sneer as he gloated over it ; he had not half done, however, before he caught a glimpse of Herbert's tears, and instantly his face assumed all its wonted terrors.

"What is't a crying for?" he demanded,

angrily, as he paused in his labour of love; "isn't the mess good enough for the likes of such as thou?"

"Hush! father," said Nell, in her gentle voice: "the poor boy seems rather weeping for joy, if I am any judge."

"Joy, marry! be them joy-tears, fool?" growled the old man, with a snarling laugh. "Get thy supper, thou little fool, thou this minute, and don't set honest folk off theirn."

"Give the poor little fellow time, Father Joe," retorted Jabez, in his deep voice. "How be the hairns, Nell?"

"All nicely, my man. Joe has quite got over his lameness, and was running about as gaily as the best of 'em to-night."

And now, for the first time (for Nell was intuitively well-bred, although only a poor boatman's wife), she stole a furtive glance at the poor boy her husband had for the time thrown upon his slender resources. Herbert's skin had already lost the delicate fairness that had lately distinguished it, and was fast becoming tanned

brown with exposure to the weather; his hair hung in tangled masses over his neck, shading the broad forehead: whilst his features were fast losing the rounded beauty that had at one time promised to make his boyhood renowned, and already wore the sharp, wretched lines of hunger and despair.

Nell gazed and gazed, for her heart was swelling within her, as she thought of her long lost Billy, whom she mourned with a silent, yet faithful, affection, although she felt he had never been so lovely as this poor child must once have been. Herbert's thin, dark features were to her more touching than all the beauty the world could have produced.

Jabez watched her, as she gazed with her wistful eyes at Herbert, apparently so absorbed in the reveries his image had called up as to have forgotten where she was. Herbert in the meantime had finished his supper, and the old miserly grandfather, who had now no object on which to vent his spleen, pushed back his chair, and climbed up a ladder which led into a loft

above, on the creaking floor of which he was presently heard pacing up and down, as he made his preparations for retiring for the night.

Then, drawing their chairs towards the fire, the husband and wife began to talk over the hopes and fears of their daily existence, Nell holding Herbert's hand, which she had taken almost unconsciously, tightly clasped in her own.

"Was that man that you put off in the boat to save, his father, Jabez?" demanded Nell, when Herbert, overcome with fatigue and sleep, had gently laid his head upon her lap, and was now lost in sweet forgetfulness; "he looks so tender and delicate, poor little thing! that one can scarcely believe him to have come of poor people like us."

"How should I know my old woman? your father is getting so weak and feeble that I couldn't get the boat along at a decent rate, or we might have saved the poor devil; he's sadly failing, is Father Joe, Nell."

A feeble cough from the loft overhead seemed to confirm the assertion.

"Oh! but he's very strong, is father, yet," said the wife, eagerly; "there was only yesterday, when Jack, who is getting a big, strong lad, was unruly, and wouldn't do as I bid him, father catched him up in his arms, and fairly held him as tight as a vice, until I feared he would do the boy an injury: but about this little lad, Jabez."

"What hast thou got into thy head now, Nell?" demanded Jabez, good-humouredly.

"Why, I may be wrong, or I may not, Jabez; but I can't help thinking he comes of better folk than the likes of us."

"Better folk, Nell?" repeated Jabez.

"Why, by better, I mean better 'off,'" retorted the buxom body: "and in the morning we must try and find out where he comes from, and restore him to his mother, if he has one; poor body! I'll warrant me her heart is sore enough for the loss of him."

"But he looks as if he had been on a tramp for months, Nell; his skin is quite black."

"A week would do that," continued Nell,

stoutly "a week of such weather as we have had would turn a snow-ball black if it didn't melt."

"But if we can't find out who he belongs to," suggested Jabez, who seemed not to wish to part with the boy, "suppose he should have been so long away from home that he has quite forgotten even his name, and where he comes from?"

"Why, in that case, we must keep him until something turns up to put us on the right beat. I'm sure I won't grudge the bit and the sup as long as we have it."

"Right said, my lass," cried Jabez, giving her plump, rosy cheek a smack that made the room ring again: "thou deserves to be a duchess, my old woman!"

"Get out, with your daft nonsense, my poor old man," retorted Nell, returning the smack: "and now I'll go and put this little un in the crib beside Jack—just look at his arm, Jabez! why, 'tis as white as driven snow!"

And unstripping the still sleeping boy, she did indeed disclose a skin that many a lady might have envied.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE old man was up many times during the night, for he had grown restless of late, and could not sleep as had been his wont ; every time that his short grotesque shadow came between Herbert and the firelight, the boy opened his large heavy eyes, and watched him with a dreamy interest. Herbert in fact never slept, for there was a strange gnawing pain hanging upon him, that effectually banished sleep, and made him as restless and much more unhappy than the old man really was. It had been coming on for several days ; in fact, although he had paid but little heed to it whilst in the company of those two wild and lawless men, now that he had leisure and quiet sufficient to think, it terrified him so much, that more than once he felt the tears coursing silently down his wasted cheeks.

How his head throbbed with the wild fearful pain, as it lay on the coarse pillow, that, for all its poverty, smelt so sweetly of the wild thyme and the meadow-sweet! How that frightful pang made his little limbs writhe and toss, although he manfully strove to prevent himself from shouting out, and thus disturbing his weary yet generous hosts! How wearily he counted the deep, dull ticking of the old clock in the corner; and how every stroke, as it told the lagging hours, beat still more loudly on his weary heart! How he yearned for the daylight once more, whilst old Joe, crouching down over the dying embers on the hearth, became transformed into some horrible gorgonic shape, and his pipe glowed like a lurid star in the darkness; how the sighing of the wind, about the creaking cottage, struck a wild chill terror upon his soul, that all the tempests he had ever heard had not been able to excite; and how he strove to pray, and could not!

Nothing, but tears! they could flow, if he could do nothing more, and they flowed freely enough.

Herbert was very ill ! he whispered the terrible fact to himself twenty times during that miserable night, as if he would fain make the fact less terrible, by keeping it continually before him ; he knew it by the throbbing head and aching limbs by the spasmodic pains that thrilled him to the very soul ; by the fearful phantoms that began to throng his mind. All the wild and appalling tales of murder and outrage he had ever heard, flocked through his memory ; grisly phantoms with glassy eyes and gibing lips, mingling with old Joe and his pipe, the weary clock and the fitful glimpses of the every-day shapes around him the flashing firelight permitted him to see. At length, the real and the ideal was so strangely blended, that he scarcely knew whether he was the victim of some horrible dream, or was in his waking senses, and still the pain and the languor continued, and the fever mounted high within him.

Suddenly the old man was startled from his doze in the chimney-corner by a sharp wailing scream, proceeding from the low crib the boy occupied. He ran forward, exclaiming, " God

Almighty ! what is the matter with the bairn? is't a ill, little 'un—is't a vera bad?" and his hand was placed tenderly on the burning temples of our poor little Herbert.

The boy's only response was a feeble moan. The phantoms were around him now ; and there, in the midst of the loathsome ring, stood old Father Joe, every feature swollen to twice its usual size, and distorted with a terrific leer. Then came another cry, that made the room ring, and Jabez, in his turn, started up from his flock bed, a huge red tassel bobbing over his nose in his hurry.

" Is that thou, Father Joe?" he asked, in a frightened tone ; for, notwithstanding old Joe's crusty temper, the young man really had an affection for him—" is that thou crying out, old 'un?"

" No, its the bairn," was Joe's answer—" he be mortal bad, I fancy ;" and Herbert's feeble moan added emphasis to the assertion.

Jabez was beside him in an instant.

" Strike a light, wilt 'a," he said quietly—" how long has he been ill?"

"I don't know as to that," was the gruff reply, for Joe was fast relapsing into the selfish peevishness that was habitual to him. "I'd been up twice or thrice, as 'is my way, for I can't rest o' nights, Jabez, now that I'm getting old and asthmatic, and was smoking a pipe, when I heard him crying out first; I fancy, though, he ha' been ill for some time, for I heard him writhing and tossing about as if he had the devil aside him, afore that."

Jabez took the candle, and held it before Herbert's face; there was a brilliant bloom over the thin sharp features, and the glassy eyes were encircled by a deep blue ring, that showed how rapid was the progress the fever had already made upon his boyish frame.

"Do you feel much pain, my little fellow?" asked Jabez, gently, as he lifted him up in his arms.

Herbert moaned and shook his head, and they heard him whisper through those white, parched lips, a prayer for water, or he would be dead.

"Fetch a drink," said Jabez to his father-in-law. "Is Nell asleep, d'ye think?"

"Yes, and munna be wakened," growled the old man, peevishly; "poor volk cannot lose their night's rest in this way."

"Nell would sit up a week, and never give in to being tired," rejoined her husband, hotly; and then, raising his voice, he cried out—"Nell, old lass! I say, wife, welt a' get up and come here, my woman."

"Oh dear, Jabez!" and Nell's head bobbed up over the board at the head of the connubial couch; "What is the matter, my man?" she demanded, in a sleepy tone.

"Matter! enough's the matter," growled old Father Joe—"the bairn that man o' thine would bring in last night is taking a dying fit."

"No, no, mother!" retorted Jabez, gently using his children's epithet to designate the plump little body that now came tumbling out of bed, exhibiting in its descent one of the neatest ankles and feet in the world—"he's only mortal ill, my pet, and I think we should have a doctor."

"A doctor!" growled old Joe from the side of his bed, on which he had now taken refuge; "and

where are we to get enough to pay a doctor, and eight bairns of our own to keep?"

"He will wait till we can pay him," said Jabez, quietly; "or if you think that 'ill be too long, there's the parish 'un."

"Parish 'un!" screamed Father Joe, rolling himself up in his blankets, "we'll have no parish keep of any kind here—Nell came into the world without un, and so did all the bairns, and nothing the parish sends shall ever come across this door, until I'm carried out of it." And a volley of growls followed up this determination of old Joe's, notwithstanding his parsimony, to have no keep from the parish.

Nell and her husband had, in the meanwhile, held a hurried consultation over poor Herbert, the issue of which was, that Jabez instantly set off for the nearest doctor, whilst Nell, slipping on her gown and stockings, raked up the fire, and threw on a few logs of wood. This latter proceeding instantly aroused old Joe's wrath anew.

"Oh Lord! oh Lord, Nell, is thou not afear'd of being frozen alone in thy bed, some o' these

nights, for such shameful extravagance? Them logs ought to have lasted un a week, and there thou's burning 'em wholesale, and for what?—why, for a beggar's brat, who nobody knows."

"We must have some hot water, father," said Nell, quietly proceeding with her operations; "the doctor will be here enow, and a pretty pickle we will be in, if we have none; I never saw such a beautiful boy!" she murmured, as another moan brought her to Herbert's side for a moment.

"Billy was far bonnier!" growled old Joe, crustily; "poor Billy was much bonnier to my thinking.—Now what is the woman blubbering about, I wonder," he yelled out, in a kind of desperation, on seeing his daughter's tears begin to flow; "dost 'e not know that Billy is dead, safe enough?"

"Oh, no! no! no!" sobbed the poor creature, in a subdued tone; "Billy will turn up one of these days, you'll see."

"Pity if he 'does," growled the old miser, pettishly; "and them five strong hungry bairns

to feed wi' Jabez's poor earnings—five, quotha! there's a sixth lying there," he muttered, indicating, with a wave of the hand, the crib where Herbert was lying. "How is the little whelp, Nell?"

"Very ill," sobbed the tender-hearted creature, hanging over Herbert; "he seems quite in a dream, and never opens his eyes, but just moans, moans enough to break one's heart."

"He'll die soon;" mumbled the old man, between his teeth.

"Oh, father, how dare ye?" said Nell, in a terrified voice; "how dare ye reckon on a fellow-creature's death in that shocking way?—didn't the minister at church on Sunday tell us that to wish a fellow-creature's death, is next to being as bad as murder?"

"Poh! poh!" laughed the old sinner, scoffingly; "they allays tell un that;—if they hung un for such thoughts, there's never a man in all the world 'ud die in his bed.—There's Jabez, dowter," he added, as steps were heard without.

Jabez at that moment appeared at the door, followed by a sleepy-eyed old gentleman, with a white head, and a benevolent expression of countenance. Old Joe was sitting up in his bed, with the blankets folded around him, for the scene was beginning to have a strange, absorbing interest for him.

The little group gathered around the boy's bed—Nell holding the candle, whilst the doctor felt the boy's pulse, and Jabez's eager, honest face, thrust in between the pair, whilst Herbert lay to all appearance insensible, if not dying, beneath; this was the picture his old bleared eyes were fixed upon.

"How long has the boy been ill, good people?" demanded the little old doctor, putting his hand to his ear.

"Not long, sir, we hope," said Nell, dropping a curtsy; "we made bold to send for you, sir, directly we saw how bad he was."

"Quite right, my good woman," said the old doctor, blandly; "but I think he must have been ill some hours; however, that has nothing to

do with the matter; I'm afraid he's caught a very bad fever."

Something stuck in Jabez's throat for a moment, for he was thinking of his children; but he swallowed it manfully, and whispered in Nell's ear,—“We mun nurse him well, wife, and he'll soon come round."

“Surely, Jabez, dear,” rejoined Nell, truthfully, “we aren't beasts, to turn the poor little fellow to the door, I hope."

Old Joe gave a short, husky cough, as he saw what was passing in the minds of his son and daughter, rather from the expression of their faces, than from anything he actually heard.—“We must get him into a hot bath as soon as possible, my good people,” said the doctor. “Ah, I see you have plenty of hot water."

Nell's honest face beamed over with good nature, as she answered in the affirmative. The doctor then bandaged Herbert's arm, and bled him, desiring Nell in the meanwhile to get a bath ready, as he would see him in it before he left.

“ He has not the look of either of you, my friends,” said the old doctor, noticing Herbert’s luxuriant, jetty locks, and delicately chiselled features, which certainly* corresponded but badly with Jabez’s and Nell’s flaxen hair, and chubby features.

“ He’s no bairn of ours, sir,” cried old Joe, from his lair, all his splenetic humours called into full play, at this innocent observation; “ he was never across our doorway afore last night, more’s the pity ! ”

“ Why more the pity, friend ? ” demanded the old doctor, mildly.

“ Why, because we be poor folk, mister, and have mouths enow and to spare to fill already,” answered old Joe, eagerly, clutching the bed-clothes in his thin, withered hands, as he spoke; “ and that’s why I don’t like to see that bairn lying there.”

“ Like it or not, you must learn to see him lie there, for many days to come, friend,” rejoined the other, quietly; “ he is in a high fever and to remove him, would be his death.”

He said the last part of the sentence very emphatically, with his face turned to the old man, as if to fix it on his mind; the other did not reply, except by a low muttering, which none of them could catch, and so the old doctor went on addressing Nell:—

“Whatever you want, send up to my house, and you shall have it at once, from my cook.—I am an old man, and childless, and can better afford to feed the hungry than you can.”

“Oh, sir,” cried Nell, eagerly, “the poor little thing is welcome to bit and sup, as long as ever Jabez can earn it; it’s not much poor folk like us can do, but that little I’m sure we blithely give to any one.”

“Ower much of that,” growled old Joe, sarcastically.

The old doctor laid his hand kindly on her arm,—“You are doing angel’s work, my good woman,” he said, gently.

Nell felt that he was speaking approvingly to her, although she scarcely understood him how, so she only dropped another curtsey, and

reiterated what she had already said ; then the doctor took his leave, shaking Jabez and her by the hand, as he went.

“ I’m sure he’s a nice, kind gentleman, that, Nell,” said Jabez, giving his wife the sovereign their late visitor had popped into his hand, at parting ; “ and as for the boy, he’s welcome to the poor shelter we can give, as long as ever he needs it.”

“ Hush ! speak lower, Jabez :” whispered Nell, laying her finger on her lip, as Herbert moaned, and turned uneasily on his bed. “ Eh, but the fit’s strong upon him enow.”

“ God, a mercy ! what poor suffering things we are, Nell !” ejaculated honest Jabez, sadly ; “ and such a young bit thing, too !”

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN a week Herbert was so much recovered as to be able to sit up. It had been a time of unusual quietness in the house, for Nell had drilled her troop of healthy brats so effectually that they never ventured into the house but on tiptoe, nor dared to speak above a whisper when they were in it. It had been a week of dreadful pain and suffering to the poor little fellow, and sadly worn and wasted was he when Jabez, who, with all his roughness, was the tenderest of nurses, carried him in his arms into the open air for a few minutes.

Herbert cast a languid eye over a group of sturdy brats who, in defiance of their mother's orders, were gamboling in the dirty road. Old Joe was sunning himself on a bench at a little

distance, beside another old man, quite as grey and withered as himself, whilst far beyond the boy's gaze stretched the broad, blue sea.

"Isn't it a pretty sight, my little fellow?" cried Jabez, with flashing eyes, as he caught the direction of the boy's gaze; "look at the waves tumbling and tossing in-shore, with the great white horses foaming over them! and then look far out, how calm and still everything is, as if the sea was one immense sheet of glass, and never a breath of wind to stir it. Yonder's an Ingeemen standing out, with all her sails set, for the long voyage that's before her. They say the Ingees lies a six months' voyage off, my lad, and that's a power of a distance, in my opinion."

"I've read about the Indies," said Herbert, feebly, in reply to this outburst. "Once, when I had been very good, my dear papa gave me a book full of pictures of tiger and elephant hunts, and grand temples, and caves, and palaces, and cities in India; and the book said what a beautiful land it is, with palm-trees growing up into the sky, and coral islands lying deep, deep down

beneath the green sea-waves. But it is a very hot place," he added, with a weary sigh, "and I don't like the heat, or I would go out there when I get better again."

He felt so light, so very light, in Jabez's arms when he said this, and looked so worn and wasted, that the latter thought he might never get better again. As he looked down upon him again, the moment after, there was so radiant a smile upon the young boy's face, that he felt as if he had never beheld so much touching beauty in a human being before.

"Carry me back again, good Jabez," murmured the boy, faintly, as a sickly pallor chased the bright glow away, "for I am very, very ill."

Jabez carried him in, and laid him on his bed again.

"I am very light, am I not, my good Jabez?" said he, with one of his sad smiles, that always cut the honest fellow to the heart, whenever he detected them.

"Rather; but you will soon grow fat and strong again," cried Jabez, stoutly. "Bless you, Nell is

such a capital cook, that she could feed a skeleton up as big as a prize ox, in no time."

"I will make a good subject for her, then," said Herbert, gently, as he held up a thin, wasted arm against the light. "Has the doctor been here to-day, Jabez?"

"Not yet, my boy, but it is almost his time, now. He will be delighted to see you looking so much better. Heart alive! it was only yesterday his housekeeper, one of the tidiest and nicest old women I ever clapped eyes upon, came down to see you, with a great basket on her arm, full of jellies, and potted meats, and wine. Why, it'll take you a month to eat your way down to the bottom of that basket, my man!"

Herbert smiled, for Jabez's chubby, grotesque-looking face had the most laughable expression possible upon it; and at that moment the little window was darkened, and Herbert, looking up, beheld the good old doctor standing before it.

"Is he better? can he walk yet?" cried the good old man, eagerly, turning his quick, grey eyes

from the boy, lying on his bed, to Jabez, who was sitting before the fire.

“ Oh, he’s quite a different being, to-day, sir,” answered Jabez and Nell, in a chorus.

The old doctor rubbed his hands delightedly, and stepped into the room. Herbert’s smile was really charming as he held out his thin, worn hands.

“ Both! both!” exclaimed the doctor, laughingly, “ are you so glad to see the nasty old doctor that you must give him both your hands?”

“ Twenty, if I had them,” said the boy, in a low voice. “ You have saved my life, sir.”

“ Oh, pho! pho! nothing of the kind. God only did it, my child,” rejoined the old man, lifting his hat, reverently. “ Has Jabez had you out yet?”

“ A very little bit, sir,” said Nell, dropping her perpetual curtsy. “ He’s woondily weak yet, and can’t abear to be moved much.”

“ Well, well, he will come to it by degrees,” said the doctor, cheerily. “ Time and patience work wonders.”

"I am very grateful, sir," said Herbert, in his touching manner.

"I know you are, my boy—I've seen it from the beginning—and when you get well again I intend to reward you for it by taking you to live with me. Now, now, don't cry, for it's very foolish, and is of no good at all. But you must make haste and get better first. I suppose Mrs. Dorothy keeps you pretty well supplied, eh?" turning to Nell.

"Oh yes, sir; there's a cold chicken, and two bottles of wine, and a jar quite full of jelly yet, and some strawberries. We have plenty to last us for some time to come."

"Very well; she musn't let you want, that's all. Good-bye, my boy," and he stretched out his hand to Herbert.

Herbert raised it to his lips, and as the doctor drew it away again, he felt a tear fall upon it, which made him mutter something that none of them could catch; the next minute he was gone, and all felt as if he had taken the daylight away with him into the bargain.

“ You shall have your dinner now, my pet,” said Nell, the moment after. “ What can you eat, dearie? ”

“ I have quite lost my appetite,” said Herbert, quietly.

“ Oh, but you must eat. Try a little jelly first,” and Nell placed a cupfull on a small tray, and sat down with it on her knee at the bedside. “ Shall I feed you, or will you do it yourself? ”

Herbert shook his head at the latter proposition, for he was still miserably weak, and, besides, his hand was so unsteady that he would never have been able to hit his mouth, if he had tried for a week; so Nell fed him with the jelly, and then filled a plate with the tit-bits of the chicken, whilst Jabez sat and looked on quite as complacently, if not more so, than if all these dainties had been intended for himself.

In the midst of these proceedings old Joe came shuffling in, with his shoulders almost looking over his head, a sure sign that he had, as Nell expressed it, “ the black dog upon him,” or, in

other words, was in one of his dreadfully bad humours.

“What’s all this waste aboot?” he demanded, in his harshest tones, “there’s them poor bairns fit to eat their finger ends off for hunger, and that brat feasted wi’ the daintiest to be had for love or money.”

“Hush! for shame, father!” retorted Nell, without looking up. “It doesn’t come out of your pocket or mine either, if he is, for Doctor Rivers sent them.”

“But he didn’t say you had to give that bairn all, Nell,” persisted the old man, eyeing her with his malevolent eyes. “I’m quite amost as weak as him, and a glass of wine or so would do me a power of good.”

“I’m sorry I can’t give it then to you, father,” said Nell, turning away her head and blushing. “Whether the doctor said it was all for the boy or not, I know he meant it was, and I’m not going to defraud any one, even for you. It’s very hard that *you* should tempt me.”

“Pray give him some of that chicken,” said

Herbert, feebly. "I may give it to whom I please, dear Nell."

He had never called her dear Nell before—perhaps she did not even hear it now—and yet her voice was immeasurably gentler, although still quite firm, as she said, "No! no! no! if we were at the last bit and sup we had, I wouldn't steal what doesn't belong to me. Jabez, you had better take the old man away with you."

Old Joe threw himself down on the long settle by the fire, and, resting his chin on his stick, glared defiance at her from beneath his shaggy penthouse lids. Nell still continued her occupation, and when Herbert had at last, after repeated assertions, convinced her by shoving away his plate that he could eat no more, she quietly got up, and put away the remainder of the meat and jelly, under lock and key, and then went about her every-day occupations in her usual quiet manner.

She scarcely noticed it at the time, although she remembered it vividly afterwards, how sullen and mute the old man sat in that dark corner

during the whole of the afternoon. He declined Jabez's invitation to go down with him to the boat, although in general he rarely spent many minutes at a time in the house, when the weather permitted him to be 'abroad; but when tea-time drew near, slunk away, and did not come home again until nightfall.

He neither wanted bit nor sup, he said, when he did come home, on Nell asking him where he had been; and that was all he condescended to say before he turned in for the night, neither did he notice the younger children as was his wont.

Mistress Dorothy came down in the evening, as usual, to inquire how Herbert was, bringing with her a picture story book, which she told Nell in a whisper, her master had bought on purpose that morning for the poor little fellow. Herbert was 'asleep when it came, so it was exhibited to all Jabez's children with great pomp and ceremony, filling their tender minds with the wildest dreams that had ever visited juvenile imaginations. Neither Jabez nor Nell could read; whilst Dorothy, who had been born before

reading became a fashionable accomplishment, was similarly situated, so that they were quite at sea, as to the subject of most of the wonderful things they beheld.

When Herbert did awaken, however, he was literally besieged in his bed by the mob of juvenile pirates, who carried the doctor's handsome present to him with all the pomp and ceremony of some magnificent triumph; and then with a perfect sea of heaving heads around him, amongst which even Jabez and Nell's were visible, the boy explained all the pictures, by reading the short story attached to each.

It was very fortunate that the good old doctor himself did not chance to put up his appearance, otherwise a rebuke might have been the consequence for these eager inquiries after knowledge; as it was, Nell at last noticed the exhaustion visible on Herbert's pallid countenance, and immediately drove the tumultuous mob out into the road, and restored the cottage to its pristine quiet.

It was some time before Herbert could compose

himself to sleep after this, so much had he been excited by the gift of the good doctor ; he did, however, fall asleep at last, and slept long and soundly, until long after old Joe had come home and gone to bed, as we have described.

He was aroused by a strange scuffling noise very near him, but so weakened both in body and mind was he by his long illness, that it was fully five minutes after he had first heard the sounds, before he became so thoroughly conscious, as to be aware of what was actually occurring beside him. When he did open his eyes, he saw by the uncertain firelight—for there was no candle burning—that two people were standing near him. One of them, who was crying bitterly, he on the instant knew from her voice to be Nell.

“ Oh get into bed again, and pray to God to forgive you, miserable wretch ! ” were the first distinct words Herbert heard her utter—“ do you hear, or shall I call up Jabez, and expose you to him, by telling him what horrible thoughts possess your mind ? ”

“ Whist, woman ! whist ! ” croaked the asth-

matic accents of old Joe, struggling to resist her sturdy grasp. "It was all a mistake, I say again, and I was only walking in my sleep."

"Walking in your sleep! and I found you with your hands upon the boy's throat," retorted Nell, in a clear low voice. "No! no! father—lie and cozen as you will, I know you. God help me that I should say it! I know you, I say, too well for that. I tell you I was just in time to save you from committing murder; and if you don't instantly go to bed again, I will arouse Jabez."

"We have many mouths to fill, Nell," whined the old man, pathetically, "and we are so very, very poor."

"If we had twenty more, and twenty more to that again," retorted Nell, boldly, as she planted herself stoutly between the bed where Herbert was lying, and the old man, "I would not turn the poor thing to the door, no! even if I knew I should want for it to-morrow myself. And now, father, to bed."

"I will! I will, Nell,—you won't tell Jabez I walk in my sleep," whispered the old man.

“ No, I will not,” said Nell, whose pale face and white dress were, at that moment, disclosed to the boy’s gaze, by a flash of light from the fire. “ But if ever you dare to walk again, I tell him on the moment.”

“ I won’t walk again, girl, I give you my word for it, I won’t ”—said the old man, feebly, as he tottered off to his lair. “ I’m getting old and feeble, Nell; and I can’t sleep o’ nights as I used ”—and, muttering and crooning to himself, the old sinner rolled himself up in his blankets, and soon pretended to be asleep.

Nell then threw herself along the foot of Herbert’s bed in such a manner, that it was impossible any one could molest him, without arousing her, and was soon, notwithstanding her recent agitation, sound asleep.

The drowsy god, however, did not so soon steep Herbert’s senses in forgetfulness. His mind, enfeebled by disease, was too hopelessly filled with the dread of all he had learned during the last few minutes, to permit of that; and, like all young people, he had an overwhelming terror of violence

in the night, which his career of the last few months had certainly not tended to eradicate.

For hours he lay on his hot, rough couch, tossing from side to side, as every moment suggested a new terror to his mind. At one moment, he would imagine old Joe was creeping across the floor to pounce upon him; and then the fear would be chased from his mind, and a new, yet not less strange dread came upon him, as he began to doubt even Nell and Jabez, who had been so kind to him; and so he lay quaking with apprehension, until his exhausted faculties could hold out no longer, and he at last fairly fell asleep.

It must have been noon when he awoke, for the mid-day sun was shining bright and cheery into the little room, driving away, as if by magic, all the terrors of the previous night. The good old doctor was sitting in a chair by the bedside, watching him, and immediately Herbert opened his eyes, this kind-hearted being took hold of his little thin hand, and said, in a cheerful voice :—

“ My dear good little boy, I have come to take

you to my house, now that you are getting so well again."

Herbert shrank away from him, and hid his face.

"Your good friends here," continued the doctor, turning to Jabez and Nell, "have given you up to me for a time, and so I have ordered my man to come down to carry you away from them for a bit; now, now don't cry, or I shall think you don't want to go, and that would distress me very much."

"Oh! I do want to go, dear sir," sobbed Herbert, throwing himself into the old man's arms; "and pray don't believe that I am insensible to all your kindness."

"My dear little fellow, I can imagine all you would say; but here is my man come for you. Weasel, carry this little fellow home, and mind you wrap him well up with the things you have brought. Has Mrs. Dorothy prepared the little French bed in the blue room?"

What a delightful vision of his little bedroom at Delaval, did the last few words conjure up to Herbert's mind.

"Everything is quite ready, sir," quoth Weasel,

who certainly did not belie his name, as far as looks went, as he was by far the sharpest, thinnest man you ever saw—"shall I roll the young gentleman up in these blankets?"

"Young gentleman!" Herbert's head rolled round with the long forgotten words, and he began to dread that it was all a dream, which could not last—and then Doctor Rivers went on, with his calm voice.—

"Yes, I think you had better, Weasel; he is very light, poor little fellow!" and he sighed.

"Oh! we'll soon fatten him up, sir," cried Weasel, stoutly. "Why, bless you, if you only saw all the jellies, and fruits, and rusks, and potted meats Dorothy has been a-making in anticipation of his coming, you would grow fat with only looking at them. It's nothing but stew, stew, stew, from morning till night, with her, sir."

Herbert was confident he was the victim of some strange delusion now. Why, if it were not, did Dr. Rivers incur so much trouble and expense for a poor unknown outcast like himself?

“ Softly, softly, my good Weasel,” said the old doctor smiling blandly: “ you are really too imaginative.”

“ Imaginative, sir ! ” echoed the indignant Weasel. “ Why, bless you, not I ! I just popped my head into our pantry this morning——”

“ To get a snack, Weasel, eh ? ” inquired his master, slyly.

“ Why then it was, sir,” rejoined Weasel, with a humorous twinkle in his small, bright eyes, that looked as sharp as needle points: “ but I’d no sooner poked my head in, than I felt a surfeit in a moment, and couldn’t eat one bit, if it had been to save my life. I was mortal hungry by dinner-time, too, sir.”

“ I should think you would’ be, Weasel,” said his master, gaily. “ But now do give those brains of yours a little rest for a time, and work your bodily members instead.”

“ Just the very thing I was going to do, sir,” rejoined Weasel, whose huge lantern-jaws seemed perpetually in motion, whilst they certainly pro-

duced what Brother Jonathan calls "everlasting talk." "When my body's at rest, my mind is at work, and *vice versa*; the mind has had a spell, and now it is the body's turn." And this practical philosopher, without another word, whipped Herbert up in his arms, and would have carried him off like a flash of lightning, had not Nell rushed between him and the door, insisting upon a parting kiss from Herbert before her little patient left her house.

Herbert hugged the little chubby woman in his arms, and received a smacking kiss in return, whilst he gave Jabez his hand, and then Mr. Weasel darted off once more with his precious freight, leaving his master to take his leave of his humble friends when and how he chose.

"Come up to-morrow evening, both of you," said he, forcing gold upon them; "Weasel knows you, and won't deny you, and you shall spend an hour with your little favourite. I quite approve of your wishing the boy to be in safer keeping than you can afford him."

“ Oh ! sir, never, never mention that,” sobbed Nell, passionately : “ your age and your grey hairs gave me confidence to tell you what might have happened last night ‘had I not awoke to prevent it ; but never let a word of it escape your lips.”

“ You may depend upon me,” said the doctor, with grave kindness. “ Your father is very old ; and, at his age, the heart and the judgment alike get warped, or he never could have dreamed of such a crime : and now I shall look for you to-morrow night, remember,” and he took his leave.

Old Joe slunk in as soon as the good doctor was out of sight. Joe had been a Deal Pilot, and still retained all the rough vulgarity of those wild, but daring men. He had once or twice distinguished himself rather favourably for his intrepidity in saving some shipwrecked wretches from what seemed inevitable destruction. But latterly, as the old doctor told Nell, his heart had become warped, or hardened, rather ; and, as an old age of poverty, but not of want, closed in upon him,

he became that most miserable of human beings—a griping, hard-fisted miser. .

He glared round the room, knitting his shaggy brows as he searched first one corner, and then another, without discovering what he sought; and then, going up to Nell, he said:—

“The bairn! the bairn, Nell! what has become of him?”

“Doctor Rivers has taken him,” said Nell, looking firmly at him.

“But we are so poor, Nell,” he whined, grasping her plump round arm in his wiry fingers.

“Just what I said, father, when he came, and told me he was an old man, and childless, and wanted something to love, and to teach to love him: and so the boy has gone with him.”

“And without paying us, Nell!” groaned the old miser, smiting his breast: “poor folk like us.”

Nell was already engaged with her household work, and did not answer him. Old Joe groaned,

and wrung his hands, and then, having satisfied himself that Herbert was really gone, he slunk out of the house, and crawled down to the beach, to see if the tide had sent anything in the shape of wreck up from the last night's storm.

CHAPTER XIX.

DALTON and his two companions had in the meanwhile returned to England, and had travelled with all possible speed down into Hertfordshire.

“Our first interview must be with that villain Vernon,” was Dalton’s observation, as he drew up the window of the chaise, on leaving Southampton; he is the source of all the evil, and dearly will I repay him for all the mischief he has done! God grant it may not yet be too late to repair it, as far as poor Herbert is concerned.”

Cecil sighed, and leaned back in the corner of the chaise, (for Dalton’s words called up a host of fears to his mind,) scarcely conscious of breathing, so painful became his feelings, as every moment lessened the distance between the enemy of his family and himself.

Norman watched them both, as they sate opposite to him, each buried in his own thoughts, glancing from Cecil, whom he thought the very handsomest young man he had ever seen, for Cecil was very much improved since we last met him in England, and had, indeed, during his short sojourn in Paris, obtained the soubriquet of "the handsome young Englishman!" to Dalton, whose under lip writhed, as he indulged the gloomy train of thought that had come upon him.

"How very strange it is!" whispered Norman to himself; "had I met this Dalton by himself, and come upon Clarendon immediately after, I certainly should never have detected it, and yet there is such a wonderful likeness, as they both sit there—the bold, aquiline nose, and commanding curve of the nostril—the massy, yet handsome mouth—the——"

"Mr. Macdonald, were you ever in this part of the country before?" demanded Dalton, breaking in upon his musings.

"I never was sir," rejoined Norman, looking very guilty.

"I have an estate here, and should be happy if you could take a week or two's shooting, whenever you can spare time, over it," was the kind offer. "Gatcombe is a strange old place, and in very bad repair, but the battue is magnificent."

"I wonder if he guessed what was passing in my mind," thought Norman, eyeing him furtively, after he had expressed his acknowledgments; "I almost think he could read one's thought, with that piercing eye of his."

"Poor dear Gatcombe," continued Dalton, abstractedly, in a low voice; "I have never been there since I was almost a boy, and yet I remember it as vividly as if I had only parted from it yesterday. The long, low house, with the verandahs opening on the beautiful lawn, the lake so bright and cool, gleaming like a silver star amidst the green verdure of the limes, and the pavilion, where my mother loved to sit and work the livelong day——" and then with sudden energy he exclaimed: "We will return and stay at Gatcombe for a night, Cecil, my lad,"—and then his countenance darkened, and he added, "I wish

to make you acquainted with a portion of my own early history, and which, in fact, intimately concerns yourself as well; and we cannot find a more fitting locale ' than poor, desolate, Gatcombe."

"Has it been long shut up, sir?" inquired Norman, who began to feel interested in the conversation; "with your keen love of sport——"

"Who told you I was a sportsman?" asked Dalton, with immovable gravity.

"No. one: and yet I can guess pretty accurately that you are.—You have all the fire and vigour in you that goes to make a good shot."

"Admitted that I am; and once, Mr. Macdonald," said Dalton, sadly, "I confess I loved my dog and gun as dearly as the best of you; and then I will answer your question.—An event of the most painful interest to myself occurred, which made the presence of the place, dear as it had been to me, in the highest degree distasteful. When once the current of feeling has turned, and we begin to dislike what we have formerly liked, our measure of disgust becomes

powerful, exactly in proportion with our former affection. I had loved Gatcombe dearly, for it was the scene of all my youthful pleasures, and was endeared, doubly •endeared to me, by the presence of the best of earthly beings; but when that event occurred, my love, as Byron has it, turned to hate, and I fled from the scene of all my early vows, with the determination of never setting foot within its precincts again."

"And now you are about to break your vow?"

"I am: time has softened down the regrets it could not obliterate, and I can once more behold poor Gatcombe with an untroubled mind; it will, however, I feel, be sadly altered, for I have suffered it to go sadly to rack and ruin since then. It is twenty years ago;" and he glanced quickly over to Cecilia, who was sitting, silent and abstracted, in his own corner, without hearing the conversation.

"What a time!" exclaimed Norman, shrugging his shoulders. "Will you not be afraid that the ghosts of all your ancestors will haunt you, immediately you set foot within it?"

Dalton laughed painfully. "It was not an hereditary property," he said.—"My father bought it on my coming of age, although we had rented it for some time previous, and intended presenting it to me on my marrying."

"An intention I suppose fulfilled," observed Norman carelessly. Dalton's features became suddenly convulsed.

"A sudden pain which I often feel," he gasped, on noticing Norman's look, and then he added, sadly—"No, Mr. Macdonald, I inherited it at his death, which did not occur for some years after."

Cecil looked up with sudden interest, for he had never heard Dalton talk so unreservedly of his earlier years.

"Was Camilla born there, sir?" he inquired.

Again Dalton's face became convulsed, and again he gave the same explanation, "We were at Genoa," he said, "when my daughter was born."

Norman eyed him furtively, for it struck him these spasms were caused by anguish of mind,

rather than by pain of body; but Dalton did not give him a further opportunity of pursuing his suspicions, as he presently began to discuss the probability of discovering Herbert, and the three soon became engaged in an earnest conversation on this topic. Dalton, in the discussion that followed, puzzled Norman more than ever by the intimate knowledge he displayed of the various tricks and deceptions practised by the London thieves on the unwary, as well as an acquaintance with their haunts.

“ I could almost fancy him a detective officer,” he muttered to himself, as he again surveyed his companion’s commanding countenance; “ and yet when I look again, what is there from a prince downwards that he might not be? and yet Cecil is very like him ! ”

Not in his spirits at that very moment, however, for Dalton had unconsciously forgotten his despondency, and was now as gay and lively as he had before appeared morose and sad; at times, however, a cloud would overspread his majestic features, and then his whole appearance altered in

a moment; no one, in fact, was more unlike himself or different than was Dalton. When the merry mood held him, he was the gayest of the gay, and not the elfin Puck himself could display a more tricksy spirit; when sad or sullen he was like the terrific clouds one sometimes sees in alpine countries, charged with thunder and destruction. It was Norman's fortune to behold him in both.

Cecil, on the contrary, presented a lugubrious gloom, that made him the most miserable travelling companion possible.

Towards evening they reached the village adjoining Jasper Vernon's residence. Leaving the chaise at the inn, Dalton and his companions walked up to the house, Cecil's impatience not permitting them even time to snatch a hurried dinner before doing so. They were shown into a dismally furnished room, which the fumes of wine told them was the dining-room, and a servant, bringing candles, said that Mr. Vernon would be with them presently.

He was longer in coming than even Dalton's stoical patience could brook, and when he did

come he was not alone; a grave, dark man, with a sallow complexion, and hair combed straight over his forehead, accompanying him.

"I think, Mr. Vernon," said Dalton, who, it was agreed upon, should open the conference, without taking his host's proffered hand, "that our interview cannot be a pleasant one, and unless this gentleman," bowing to the stranger, "who returned it in an awkward manner enough," "is a relative—"

"I never transact business except when accompanied by Mr. Sharp, sir," said Jasper, speaking with great trepidation. He was, in fact, dreadfully unnerved, although he had swallowed almost a full bottle of wine beforehand, with the vain hope of acquiring courage by it; "whatever, therefore, you have to say, sir, must be said before him."

His auditor bowed, and said, "My name is Dalton, sir, although I daresay you are already aware of it."

Jasper Vernon also bowed, and, for the first time, ventured to look up. What he saw did not

tend to reassure him, for there was something in Dalton's visage that filled him with indefinable terror; towards the place where Cecil stood, trembling with emotion, he did not venture to look, for he had already seen enough.

"We have come here, Mr. Vernon," continued Dalton, in a cold clear voice, "from Paris, at your request, and on a very painful errand. As acting executor of the will of the late Colonel Clarendon, the care of Herbert Clarendon was committed to you."

Vernon bowed, cringingly, fawningly, and Dalton could have spurned him like some noisome reptile, but with a great effort he went on—

"That boy is missing, Mr. Vernon, and at your hands I demand him."

"Mr. Vernon would be most happy to comply with your very reasonable request, did he know where the boy was to be found, Mr. Dalton," said lawyer Sharp.

"When I address myself to you, sir," said Dalton, with freezing hauteur, "I will expect an answer, and not before."

“ I was only going to observe, sir, in continuation,” cried the lawyer, eagerly.

“ One word more, sir,” said Dalton, white with rage, “ and I eject you by the shoulders from this room. If your employer there,” pointing to his host, “ chooses to have you to play the spy upon his guests, I, for one, will not allow you to address yourself to me.”

“ Sharp, be quiet, if you please,” said Jasper Vernon, in a low tone; and then, without changing his position, he said, “ I feel it a most unfortunate occurrence, Mr. Dalton, that poor dear Herbert should have disappeared so mysteriously. I am sure he always experienced the kindest treatment from every one in this house; and his tutor, especially, had his orders from me not to use corporeal punishment at all.”

Dalton smiled grimly whilst the wretched hypocrite continued to plead in his own extenuation thus abjectly: that it had not convinced him, however, was evident by the tone with which he demanded, without giving him time to conclude,

what means he had taken to discover the boy's retreat.

"I am sure we have used every means in our power," said Jasper, in a whining tone; "I have spared no expense nor trouble on that head."

Dalton smiled incredulously. "That is to say, Mr. Jasper Vernon, you have expended a few paltry pounds."

"Mr. Vernon, I can assure you, has been most extremely liberal," said lawyer Sharp, in momentary forgetfulness of Dalton's threat.

"Well, Mr. Vernon," said Dalton, rising, "I believe I am an executor of Colonel Clarendon's as well as yourself, and as I am in England I shall consider it my duty to take this affair out of your hands. By employing a London detective officer of the highest intelligence, I trust in God I shall soon recover possession of this poor boy. If not, mark me, a day of heavy retribution is in store for you."

"This is really very extraordinary language, Mr. Dalton, for you to employ to me," said Jasper, turning very pale, notwithstanding his

efforts to brazen it out. "Do you mean to imply that I have made away with the boy by any underhand means?"

"Time shall bring that to light, sir," retorted Dalton, gravely. "I know you, sir, of old, when you were not so wealthy, nor stood so high in the world's esteem as you do now."

"Really, Mr. Dalton—"

"But beware, sir," continued his visitor, towering over him with his majestic height, "a day of retribution will surely come even to you for many a past misdeed, of which this, the last, only swells the dismal catalogue. From my soul I tell you I believe you have acted falsely with poor Herbert; but, if it is so, look to yourself," and Dalton strode to the door.

"Such language, Mr. Dalton, is perfectly unpardonable," began Jasper, but he was interrupted in his harangue before he could get farther by Cecil, who rushed forward, and, confronting him, cried in a hoarse voice—

"And I, too, villain, shall seek Herbert at your hands. Your sneaking, tell-tale counte-

nance declares your guilt too surely for you to establish your innocence," and, grasping Jasper's lean neck with his hands, he threw him upon lawyer Sharp, who was coming to his principal's rescue, and followed Dalton from the room, Norman having already done so.

I feel that it is no disparagement to Cecil's manliness to confess that immediately he was beyond the house the excitement that had carried him through so far broke down, and he could not restrain the tears that welled up to his eyes. Norman was the only witness to his emotion, for Dalton strode onwards toward the village where they had left the chaise, at a pace that a giant might have envied. The last plank that held him up on the stormy sea of despair that howled around him had gone down, and he was left to struggle with his evil destiny as he could.

When the young men reached the inn, they found fresh horses, by Dalton's orders, had been already put to the chaise; he was himself standing by the open door, whilst the landlord was filling a hamper with refreshments and wine

for them to take with them. "Jump in, gentlemen," he cried, as they came up, and then, following them, he motioned mine host to shut the door, and cried out, in a loud voice, "To London!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE doctor and his two companions, the old servant man carrying Herbert as tenderly as if he had been an infant, were a full hour in arriving at the country residence of the former, although it was little more than a mile out of town. The easy rocking motion had such a soothing effect upon the poor little fellow, that he slept nearly all the way; and it was only on their stopping at last, that he awoke and opened his eyes to the scene around him, with a cry of delight that brought his new protector to his side in a moment.

It was indeed a lovely place, for it had been built hundreds of years ago, and was now called the Grange, and stood amongst its gardens and woods more like a beautiful picture in a dream

than a waking reality. On one side, a steep bank shelved down to the waters of a brook, that went murmuring on its way past silent woods and shady lawns, here opening out a view of a tiny waterfall, and there disclosing itself to the eye, cool, deep, and dark, beneath the shade of some noble elms; the air was heavy with the scent of a thousand delicious odours, and high over head came the thrilling song of a lark, that they had just startled from its nest at their feet.

And then there was the old Grange, grey, and quaint, and antique, with its old fashioned turrets and balconied windows, around which the starry jessamine and the graceful vine hung in a mass of verdure. A peacock, spreading his gorgeous feathers to the sun, stood like an eastern potentate glittering with jewels on the wall of the terrace; and half-a-dozen dogs, a splendid fellow of a blood-hound and two or three King Charles's spaniels, came bounding towards them the moment the doctor's old fashioned figure was descried within the limits of his lovely residence.

"I feel better already—very much better," whispered Herbert, as the doctor pressed his little worn hand whilst they advanced up the shrubbery. "How sweet everything seems, dear sir! oh, how very sweet!"

The doctor's eyes were raining down tears of delight as he listened, although he was chiding the dogs and affecting to examine his dahlias at the same moment.

"Down, Luath, down, sir!" he cried, threatening the blood-hound with his stick. "My dear little fellow, we will make a man of you in a week—Fie, Spot!" he added, driving away a beautiful spaniel, who almost devoured him with caresses. "You must make haste and grow well again, very, very soon, and then, please God, we will make amends for all the misery you have suffered of late."

How beautiful he looked as he said these few simple words to the little pale listener, who lay in the old servant's arms as weak as an infant! His white hair and bright eyes, his complexion as clear and fresh as winter berries, his hale, neat figure

encased in a suit of black, with silver buckles in his shoes, and a broad-brimmed hat, such as you still at times see some old vicar, in a quiet, sequestered place, wearing, really made the dear old doctor look quite handsome. He looked for all the world like a picture by Sir Joshua just stepped down from its frame. It was the costume of a century ago, but how fresh and well preserved it was !

They got into the house at last, and here new delights met Herbert's eyes on every side. The hall was completely filled, in every part, with a miniature museum of stuffed birds and wild beasts, most of which the doctor had himself shot on the river Amazon and the Orinoco, for he had been a great traveller in his youth, and was full of the tales of wild adventure and privation he had gone through. But they did not stop long here, for they were afraid of exhausting the little stock of strength Herbert possessed, but passed at once into a room, opening out with its French windows upon the cool, verdant lawn without.

How very, very different it looked to the small

contracted, yet withal clean kitchen, which Jabez and Nell fondly imagined to be without its parallel in the world. The green walls hung with pictures, in their glittering, gold frames; flowers in vases, on the tables; a couple of love-birds warbling in their gay cage near one window, a forest of geraniums and hepaticas in the other; a piano, with some open music lying on it; and over all, the delicious perfume of a thousand flowers—was certainly a striking contrast to the stifling closeness of Jabez's cubiculum.

“Papa! papa!” cried a little fairy, with cheeks glowing like rosebuds, and a shower of golden curls, bounding into the room; “Oh, papa, what a time you have been away! and Luti and I have been so fretting for you.”

“Hush, hush, Sophy, and be still, will you?” rejoined the dear old doctor, kissing each rosy cheek in turn: “do you not see I have brought you a little playfellow?”

“Oh, that will be charming, papa!” cried the little thing, clapping her hands in her delight, whilst Luti, a little Italian greyhound, all fantas-

tically decorated with blue silk ribbons, and a collar of bells, gambolled and frolicked about her; "but how pale he is!"

"He has been ill, my love," said the kind physician.

"But you are better, now, are you not?" inquired Sophy, bringing her large blue eyes on a level with those of Herbert.

"I soon shall be," was the feeble rejoinder.

"Oh, what hollow eyes you have!" prattled the child, shrinking back for a moment; "and how sharp the bones stand out on your face! Do all ill people look like you?"

The *naiveté* of the question made the good doctor smile. "Do you remember, Sophy, having the measles?"

"Oh yes, papa; and how you used to carry me about the garden, and got me a pony to ride upon. Can you ride, little boy?"

The question brought the bright glow of health for a moment to Herbert's pale features.

"Yes, I see you can," prattled Sophy, without waiting for his reply. "Oh, that is delightful,

for we can have such fine romps in our wood. Shall I bring Dorothy to see him, papa?"

"Not yet, my love; we must let him get a good sleep first, and then Dorothy shall see him. Now run away with Luti, and play till dinner time."

"Yes, yes! I will; but what do they call him?" she asked, pointing with one finger to the boy.

"Ask him yourself, my pet."

Sophy turned her beaming eyes upon the little invalid.

"Herbert Clarendon," was the whispered reply.

Good old Doctor Rivers started, and darted a keen, eager look at him.

"Herbert Clarendon!" he echoed, in astonishment.

"Oh, what a pretty name!" cried Sophy, clapping her hands. "Mine is Sophy Rivers, Herbert."

"Did you live at Delaval? was your papa a colonel? had you ever a brother?" were the questions the old man asked, one after another, as rapidly as he could give the words utterance, as he

bent over the sick boy's couch in sickening suspense. "Oh speak, my dear child!"

"Papa lived at Delaval," cried the boy, bursting into tears, as the question brought all before him once more.

The doctor did not speak, but stood for several minutes absorbed in thought. "Go to sleep now, my love," he said, at length; and taking the little girl by the hand, left the room, and closed the door behind him.

Herbert was too thoroughly excited by all the strange events of the last hour or more, to obey his parting injunctions all at once. His rapid removal from Jabez's cottage was evidently owing to the scene with which old Joe had been mixed up during the preceding night; and the remembrance of this, for a time, threw him into a state of terror truly pitiable to behold. But now, however, he was once more safe, and amongst good people, in a beautiful house, with a kind protector in the good physician, and a playmate in little Sophy; and the pleasant images these thoughts called up, together with the perfume of the

flowers, and the heavenly repose of all around, broken only at intervals by the low murmuring song of the love-birds in the window, gradually steeped his jaded senses in oblivion, and he fell asleep.

It was evening when he awoke, for the long sun-shadows were streaming in through the windows in a lengthened line. The old doctor was sitting beside him with a placid yet anxious smile irradiating his venerable countenance ; and, peeping over his shoulder, Herbert caught a glimpse of Sophy's rosy, eager face. Mistress Dorothy, in a widow's cap and grey silk gown, stood in all the glory of her position in the household, at a little distance.*

The doctor felt his pulse : it was calm and healthy. His skin was cool, and his eyes had lost their unnatural brilliancy, "although they still looked out from their hollow depths upon him : and, in an eager whisper, he pronounced Herbert to be recovering. Sophy clapped her hands, and frisked about the room with Luti, whilst Mistress Dorothy came forward armed with a basin of jelly, which she made our little hero swallow as rapidly

as possible. Then she went away, and presently returned with a sponge steeped in aromatic vinegar, with which she sponged Herbert's face and hands, and made them feel cool and pleasant. And, after all this, the doctor ordered the old man-servant to carry Herbert to his own room for the night.

It, too, looked out over the velvet lawn, beyond which you caught a glimpse of the woods. Sophy had mentioned; and, although very small, looked so elegantly furnished with the gay French bed, and the tiny bookcase in a recess, that Herbert, feeble as he was, could not conceal his delight.

"My little room is next to yours, Herbert," cried Sophy, who had stolen in after the rest of the party; "and when you are quite well——"

"You must go away now, Sophy, or Herbert never will get better in this world," interposed the doctor, marching her to the door.

Herbert slept soundly that night, and, on awaking, declared that he really was strong enough to walk now; the doctor, however, would not hear of it, but insisted upon his occupying the same couch he had done the day before; and this being

wheeled to an open window, Sophy brought her playthings to it, and began to prattle away to him as gaily as if they had known each other for a lifetime. The doctor had all this while been bustling in and out of the room, engaged with his usual morning avocations, and these being at last concluded, he came and sat down beside them.

“Do you remember anything of your early life, my boy?” he asked, anxiously, as Herbert took his hand, and pressed it to his lips.

“Not much, sir: I remember my dear papa, and Cecil.”

“Cecil?—who is Cecil?”

“My brother; but he is quite a man, and almost as tall as papa was: and then I have a sister, Eleanor.”

“And how, my dear child, do I come to find you in this strange plight?”

Herbert hid his face in his hands, and began to sob aloud.

“Has Herbert been naughty, papa?” demanded Sophy, looking wistfully up into the physician’s face.

“Hush, my love! Herbert!”

The boy uncovered his face, and fixed his hollow eyes upon him, tremblingly.

“ I wish to know all your little history, my dear boy, because as soon as you recover, it is my first duty to restore you to your friends,” said the good doctor, gravely.

To his great surprise, the boy burst into a violent flood of tears, and exclaimed, “ Oh ! let me stay with you, dear sir ; pray don't send me back to naughty Mr. Vernon.”

“ Who is Mr. Vernon, my love ? ”

“ I do not know ; but he took me away from Cecil and Eleanor, and I cannot love him.”

“ This is all very strange,” thought the good doctor, both looking and feeling terribly perplexed. The boy could not be deceiving him, and yet on what other supposition could he solve the mystery that enveloped it.

“ Jasper Vernon used to whip me,” sobbed Herbert ; “ and he would not let me keep my pony, as I used to do at Delaval ; and I had no one to play with.”

“ Oh papa, how dull that would be,” whispered

Sophy, shrugging her little shoulders, "and to whip him too!" .

"But how did you get into the plight I found you in?" inquired Doctor Rivers, on whose mind the truth began to dawn faintly.

Herbert looked up bravely this time, and said, "I ran away."

"That was very, very wrong, my boy, and you have been severely punished for it; unhappy as you were with Mr. Vernon, I am sure you have been ten-fold more so since you left his house."

Herbert assented to this observation, with a groan, and lifted up his swimming eyes to the good old doctor, who could not resist their silent appeal.

"I am afraid, Herbert, your brother and sister are very unhappy at your disappearance, and they must be apprised as soon as possible that you are here. Do you know where either of them are?"

"I do not, sir; but I believe Eleanor left Delaval with Lady Susan."

"Lady Susan!"

"Yes; a nasty old woman, who I hate quite

as much as naughty Jasper Vernon," cried Herbert, with something of his old spirit.

"Oh fie, Herbert," cried Sophy, shaking her head.

"But who is Lady Susan, my love?" inquired the doctor.

"I do not know;" and Herbert, in reality, had never heard her ladyship's surname.

"Then I must immediately write to Mr. Vernon."

Herbert renewed his entreaties that Jasper Vernon should not be made acquainted with his actual retreat, and really looked so terrified at the bare thought of once more falling into his clutches, that the good doctor readily promised that the latter should not be divulged.

"I will myself set out this evening for Hertford, my dear child, and have an interview with Mr. Vernon, for the purpose of discovering where Mr. Cecil Clarendon and his sister at present are; Sophy and you can, in the meanwhile, amuse each other, and I shall expect on my return to find you quite strong, and with a little more bloom on your cheeks."

“ But you will not let Mr. Vernon know where I am ? ” again implored Herbert, clasping his little worn hands.

“ I will not ; for I am afraid, my dear little fellow, that he has behaved in the most cruel manner to you. I hope, however, I shall be able to bring your brother Cecil down with me, and with him I am sure you will feel yourself safe. Now you must rest yourself a little, and then try to pick the wing of a chicken, or something of that kind. • Run out into the garden, Sophy, and give Luti'an airing, whilst Herbert takes his nap.”

The boy's eyes were fixed on the fairy form of the child, as she bounded away across the lawn, as gracefully agile as the beautiful animal by which she was accompanied, whilst sad and painful thoughts occupied his mind ; he dreaded the thought of Jasper Vernon discovering his retreat, notwithstanding all the good doctor had promised to the contrary ; and the languor of recent illness, that most depressing of all sensations, was still upon him, and weighed down his spirits so

mournfully, that he found relief at last in a flood of tears.

Sophy came in to him along with Mrs. Dorothy, when the latter brought him his lunch ; the child had culled the fairest and the sweetest flowers she could find, and now presented them, with a timid grace and a blush, that made Herbert think her even prettier than he had fancied her on the preceding night.

“ Do you make haste and get better, will you,” she whispered, pouting her dewy lips to be kissed, “ and then we will ride Donald up and down the woods, and I will show you all the pretty places where the primroses grow.”

In the evening Doctor Rivers came into his room, prepared for his journey.

“ I come to assure you once more, my dear little fellow, that Jasper Vernon shall not learn your hiding-place from me ; and, unless I can discover Cecil's, I mean you to live with me. Do as Mistress Dorothy and Weasel bid you until I come back, I trust, along with your brother. God bless you ! ”

He pressed Herbert's hand in his own, looked gravely at his wasted face for a moment, and then quitted the room, without uttering another word. He paused to give some directions to his house-keeper, as he passed through the hall, and then got into his carriage; Herbert's pale face and hollow eyes, however, haunted him for miles after he had commenced his journey.

END OF VOL. II.

